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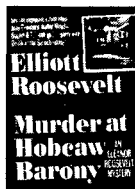
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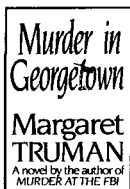
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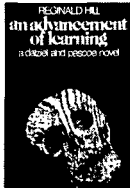
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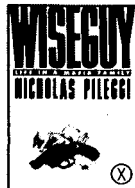
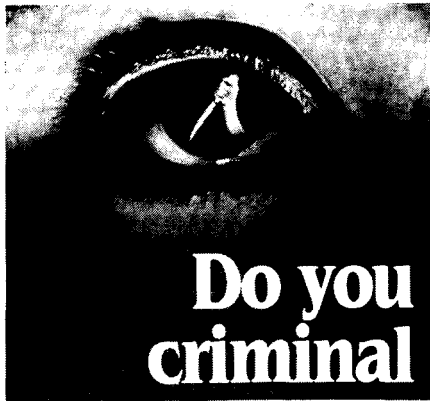
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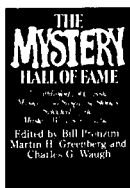
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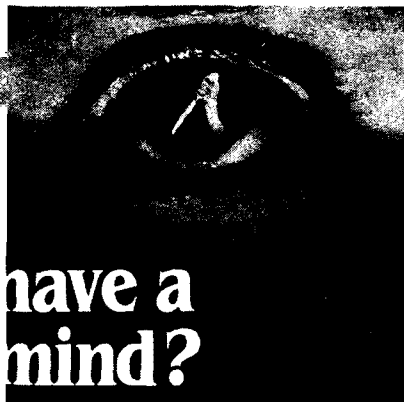
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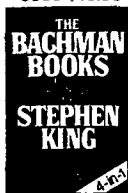
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**ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE** © Vol. 31, No. 12, December, 1986. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., \$1.95 per copy in the U.S.A. \$2.25 in Canada. Annual subscription \$19.50 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$23.00 elsewhere payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion O. 43305. Call (614)383-3141 with questions regarding your subscription. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. Canadian 3rd class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. © 1986 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. The stories in this magazine are all fictitious, and any resemblance between the characters in them and actual persons is completely coincidental. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Form 3579 to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1932, Marion, Ohio 43305. In Canada return to 628 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario, N8Y3L1.

ISSN: 0002-5224.

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# EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

**I**n this issue . . . a new story by Avram Davidson, the first in AHMM in twenty-five years (we know that's much too long), and a very clever one indeed. We wish we could say more about it, but our lips are necessarily sealed; you'll understand why when you read the story.

We can say something, however, about Joseph Hansen's tale, "Witch's Broom," which stars Hack Bohannon, a California former deputy sheriff now turned private investigator. "Witch's Broom" has to do with a mysterious grave, and is full of rugged California countryside.

Two previous Hack Bohannon stories were published in our sister magazine EQMM; if you'd like to read those, too, they were "The Tango Bear" (Mid-December 1984) and

"Snipe Hunt" (February 1986). And there will be another Bohannon tale forthcoming in AHMM soon.

Welcome also to Sara Plews, whose first story, "Murder by the Tubful," will intrigue you and amuse you, we think. It's a delightful puzzler.

For the rest . . . there's quite a range, from Rob Kantner's P.I. Ben Perkins, involved this time in a distinctly madcap adventure, to Jas. R. Petrin's particularly evocative and moving story "Early Summer," to two quite different treatments of a deep-rooted human failing by Lawrence Doorley and Jeffry Scott. And something unusual this time from our movie reviewer, Peter Shaw, who is just back from London and takes a look at current crime on stage in that home of Holmes and Watson.

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(New York: 212-557-9100; Chicago: 312-346-0712; Los Angeles: 213-785-3114)

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FICTION

# The Eye Went By

— by —

## Rob Kantner



Illustration by Peter D. Fasolino

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“**Y**ou’re a private detective, right?” Carole said.

“Sixteen hundred dollars!” Pat Sajak said. “What do you want to do now?”

“I’ll spin,” said the contestant.

“Okay,” Sajak said doubtfully as the contestant bent to the wheel.

I pried my eyes away from the TV and looked at Carole. “You know I’m a private detective. So what?”

She flattened her paperback on her stomach and slid into a half-upright position on the sofa. “Detectives are supposed to be *exciting*,” she said.

“Says who?”

The contestant asked for an M. Sajak gave his regrets. The next contestant spun the wheel to the claps and cheers of the audience. I looked back at Carole, who was giving me a dark stare. “Says all the books and the movies,” she answered.

“Oh, them.”

“Yeah, *them*! I’ve been reading a lot of these books lately, and—”

“Maybe you’ll pass along some pointers sometime.” I looked back at the screen just in time to see the wheel hit **BANKRUPT**.

“And,” she went on, “*these* detectives are *always* doing exciting things. Solving mysteries, apprehending criminals,

righting wrongs. Then I look at you, lying there on the La-Z-Boy, cigar in one hand, beer can in the other, feet up in the air with a big toe poking through—”

“You making some point here?”

She turned and sat straight on the sofa and crossed one mile of tanned leg over the other. “I don’t know. I invite you over for the evening, and what do we do? Sit around, *that’s* what we do.”

“Hey, I’m not particular. Find me a nice tasty little crime and we’ll fool around with it, kid,” I grinned. “Beggars can’t be choosers.”

“I’m no beggar!”

I snorted. “I didn’t mean you. I meant—”

“Beggars can’t be choosers!” the contestant squealed.

“You got it!” Sajak trilled as the orchestra played and the audience applauded.

“I got it before *she* did,” I muttered.

Carole did her sarcastic one-hand clap. Will Somers, Carole’s stocky, blond six-year-old, trotted into the living room. “Ben, can you help me, ole buddy?”

I should mention here that Will isn’t my kid, he’s Carole’s. And Carole, who’d been a steady squeeze for a while, wasn’t any more. We had a platonic relationship based on mutual need. She lawyered for me, I did fix-

ing for her. Service for service, no cash changing hands; just two more cogs in the great underground economy.

"What do you need, Will?" I asked him.

"Can you read me this book?" Will asked, advancing on me shyly.

"Sure, kid." I hadn't seen Will much that evening; besides, the contestant was choosing her prizes, and I just knew she'd end up with the lifesize porcelain dog.

Will handed me the book. I knew the blue cover well. *The Fly Went By* by Doctor Seuss. I knew the story even better, having read it to Will about eight zillion times. A kid gets involved in a chase, with a whole sequence of connecting episodes. About as much like real life as the detective thrillers Carole reads. Will could never seem to get enough of it. He'd sit there and listen to me read, nodding, mouthing the words, eyes bright and face happy, innocently secure in the predictable. The essence of entertainment.

"Gentlemen," Carole said. We looked at her. "First, if you don't mind, an errand. We need milk."

"Ohhhh," Will said.

"No problem," I answered, aware that I was almost done with the last beer in inventory. "Take care of it right quick.

Have to pick up some gas, too, I'm running on fumes."

"Can I go with you?" Will asked.

"I don't care. You care?" I asked Carole.

"I don't care. But, Ben?" I squinted at her as I rose. "Just a *small* candy bar. And don't do any lollygagging out there."

I held out my hand to Will, who took it. "Just going for milk," I said to Carole. "Routine. Like you say: boring, boring, boring."

"Can I have a treat at the store?" Will asked.

"We'll see." I answered absently because I'd become interested in the gold Toyota Corona ahead of us. There was a couple in the front seat, and in the early evening light I could see that they were having an argument. The man drove, the woman rode shotgun, and they looked at each other more than straight ahead, tossing silent shouts back and forth. I kept my '71 Mustang front bumper hard up on the Toyota, watching the occupants intently.

"Maybe some bubble gum," Will said.

"Sure, fella." The woman in the Toyota lunged at the driver, smacking him in the side of the head. The driver grabbed her permed hair with his right hand, pulled her toward him, then

jammed her head hard against the passenger side window. I gripped the Mustang wheel harder. "Jesus Christ!"

"What, Ben?" Will asked.

Red reflected blip-blip-blip in my rear view mirror. I tossed a glance over my shoulder. Cycle cop. I pulled over, slowing, praying for him to zip past me. He did not oblige, just followed me down as we slowed to the curb. I shut off the engine, popped open the glove compartment, and dug for the paperwork as the cop propped his bike on its kickstand and swaggered toward my Mustang. "We got trouble, Will," I said.

"Oh no," the boy answered.

The young, fresh-faced, helmeted policeman leaned against my Mustang. "Okay, let's see it," he said.

I handed over license and registration and proof of insurance. He squinted at it, then looked at me. "You know I gotcha doing fifty in a thirty-five."

The Toyota was long gone. I frowned up at the cop. "So, like, guilty as charged. I can take the weight. Write me up and let's be done with it."

"Preciate your cooperation. Lemme go pester the computer, I'll be right with you." He started back toward his cycle, but had made only ten feet when an old rusted station wagon blasted past us, sideswiping a VW bug

parked innocently across the street from me. The next thing I heard was the cop's cycle fire up. He cruised up to my car, hollered, "Drive more careful next time," tossed my paperwork at me, and shot past like a bullet after the station wagon.

"What happened?" Will asked.

"There is a God, my boy," I answered, as I put the Mustang in gear and gunned up the street.

Will sat on his knees in the bucket seat, peering over the dashboard. "What's the policeman doing?"

"He's going to catch that bad guy there. Watch." I was doing nearly fifty on the side street, trying to keep up with the cop, who in turn gained fast on the rusted station wagon, flasher blinking. The station wagon did not slow down. The cop, who drove the bike with the flamboyance of a rookie, swerved left and pulled up alongside the wagon. They rode side by side like that for a second, then the wagon, without slowing, pulled left, crowding the bike, forcing it closer, closer, closer to the left-hand berm till the cop, who didn't have the sense to slow down or speed up, shot off the street onto the shoulder and down into the grassy ditch. Even so, he probably wouldn't have lost it if he hadn't stood on his brakes. The bike slewed side-



ways and then down in the shaggy weeds, the cop flying the other way head over heels like a cowboy who'd been shot off his horse.

I slowed slightly as we reached him. The cop was crawling shakily to his feet, apparently uninjured except maybe for his pride. I hollered out the window, "I'll get him for ya," slammed my shifter into second, and popped the clutch. The Mustang catapulted forward with a long scream of rubber and hurtled forward, pressing us back into our bucket seats.

"We gonna catch him, Ben?" Will asked excitedly.

"Yes, sir. Friend to law enforcement everywhere," I muttered.

The station wagon hung a right. I did the same, faster, thanks to my racing suspension, and changed up, gaining on him. We entered an older residential area, the street parked sporadically with cars on both sides. The wagon heedlessly slalomed back and forth, dodging cars. I stayed with him grimly, sure that he couldn't keep it up for long, and he didn't. He tried to shoot a four-way stop ahead of a pickup truck, just barely missed being broadsided, and had just recovered from that when he suddenly had to jink right to avoid being hit by a car backing out of a driveway. His outboard

tires slammed the sharp stone curb on the right and then jumped it and mowed down three mailboxes in rapid sequence, gaining fast on a Hertz rental truck parked peacefully at the curb by a vacant lot. His right front tire, apparently damaged by the curb, chose that moment to let go, and the station wagon lost control completely, going into a smoky sideways spin, which ended when he plowed into the rental truck.

I geared down, squealed to a stop at the curb fifty feet back of the collision, shut off the motor, retrieved my .45 automatic from its clip beneath the bucket seat, and threw open the door. The wagon's driver side door was open and a young skinny permhead was racing like a track star into the vacant lot, which was empty except for weeds and a forest of Detroit Edison electrical towers. "Stay put," I hollered to Will, and jumped out of the Mustang and took off running after the perp. A hundred yards into the race I knew it was no good. The perp was twenty years younger, was in better shape, and had adrenaline to fuel him. Arms and legs pumping, he gained steadily, then took a ten foot chain link fence with a scrambling climb and effortless drop like he'd been doing it all his life. I skidded to a stop in the weeds as the

perp ran on and was engulfed by a thick stand of trees. My .45 hung heavy and useless in my hand. No matter how tempting it is, I don't whack a man just because he drives like a maniac.

Panting, I hoofed heavily back toward the Mustang. Will had disobeyed my orders and was walking hesitantly toward the station wagon, which sat on two flats, steaming, married to the back of the rental truck. "Get back in the car, kiddo," I holstered.

Will looked at me, and I thought he said, "Baby crying."

"Back in the *car*, damn it!"

"Baby crying!" Will shouted back.

I trotted to him, and from somewhere in the wagon heard a thin wailing. Holding Will back with one hand, I opened the back door. The evening light was rapidly fading, but I had no trouble seeing the securely belted child seat, the little booties waving in the air, and the tiny toothless teary-eyed baby face wailing plaintively at me.

"Is it a boy or a girl?" Will asked from the back seat as we drove.

"Boy, I guess. Wearing a blue shirt. Haven't researched it further." Though, judging from the smell, I'd have to pretty soon.

The baby's crying had tailed

off to an occasional breathy wail. I heard Will say, "Nice baby." Then: "What're we gonna do, Ben?"

"Find a phone," I said, hanging a right on a four-lane commercial street. "There's a name and phone number stenciled on the baby seat there. Must be the mother."

"Why'd that man run away from him?"

"No idea." A self-service gas station hove into sight on the left. "We'll drop on in here, top off the tank, and make our call from here, okay, Will?"

"I have to go to the bathroom."

"We'll take care of that, too." I wheeled the Mustang in and stopped at the pump island next to hi-test. As I got out, a young dark-skinned man in denims strolled out of the building toward me. "Fill it up for you, sir?"

"Thought this was self-serve."

"Happy to oblige," he grinned.

Miracles never cease. Nobody'd pumped my gas since Nixon was in. "Suit yourself. Got a phone here?"

"Busted. Sorry." He pulled the nozzle from the pump, hit the switch, opened my gas cap, stuck the nozzle in, and started to fill. "Try up the street."

"Okay." Will climbed out of the Mustang behind me. "Round the side, I guess," I told him. He nodded and walked away. I

leaned against the fender and glanced through the back window at the baby. He lay there in his car seat, mouth agape, staring around, mostly quiet now. Tough kid.

"Where's your boy going?" the attendant asked me.

"The head," I answered off-hand.

The pump shut off. The attendant withdrew the nozzle and snapped it back into the pump. I hauled out my wallet and was picking through the bills in search of a sawbuck when I saw that the attendant was walking away. "Gas free, too?" I called.

He didn't look back or respond, just walked purposefully to a newish Chevy Nova parked in front of the station office and got in.

"Hey. Hey, Jack. Where are you going?"

He fired up the motor, squealed back, then shot forward and swerved out of the lot onto the crowded street.

I held my wallet, staring dumbly after him, then swiveled and stared at the station office. Empty. What the hell, guy fills my tank and then splits. I had no time to puzzle it further because just then Will appeared around the corner of the station, walking stiff-legged, eyes saucerlike, mouth moving soundlessly. I instinctively started for him and found

my voice. "What's up, Will?"

The boy raised a big fist and jabbed his finger back the way he'd come. "A man! In there, by the pee-pot!" he managed.

I moved faster. "What man?"

"In there, Ben! You gotta help!"

I reached the boy, almost ordered him to stay put, then changed my mind and took him with me to the half-open men's room door, from which issued a black work shoe topped by a white sock.

For having been robbed, pistol-whipped, drop-kicked, gagged, and left hog-tied around the men's room commode, the gas station attendant was pretty damn arrogant. When I'd released him, he refused to let me use the station phone. He refused my offer to wait around to give the cops my story. He shrugged off my solicitous comments with a sneer. This was the eighth time he'd been robbed, and relieved of the smallest take yet, only twenty-two bucks. It was routine for him, probably rating a casual mention on his job description. He didn't even call the police, just reported the event to his corporate office and then lighted a cigarette and stood fidgety and obnoxious, plainly desiring my immediate departure, behaving as though I was the one who committed the crime in-

stead of the one who freed him from his wire and adhesive tape bonds on the soiled stinking men's room floor.

I loaded Will into the Mustang and motored up the street, bound for a grocery store. Will sat in the back, excitedly telling the gurgling baby the whole story. I sat in the front, planning my strategy. Call the phone number from the baby's car seat, get an address. Pick up the milk and beer I'd started out for. Go to the address and drop off the baby and then head the hell back to Carole's house, where we'd be safe.

The light was about gone when we reached the grocery store. I parked in the crowded lot, hoisted the baby out of his car seat, and carried him with one arm while holding Will's hand with my free one as we headed for the entrance. The baby felt toothpick light, soft and warm, totally trusting as he cooed and whispered nonsense to the side of my face. Will looked up at me and smiled confidently. Six-year-olds trust you, too.

The entranceway to the store was deserted except for a trio of young men, the oldest maybe seventeen, dressed uniformly in dark tight pants, tight white shirts open to the solar plexus, gold chains shining against their brown skins. One of them, the biggest, sauntered toward me

as we reached the sidewalk. "Hey, man, do me a favor," he said snottily, half blocking my way.

I stopped and dropped Will's hand. "Not tonight, pal. Go screw."

"Now ain't *that* some way to talk," he sneered, jamming his hands meaningfully into his pockets. "Want you should fetch us out here a six of PBR tall-boys, that's all."

"You're not old enough, wise guy."

He drew himself up straight and nudged me hard with his shoulder, eyes narrowing. "Old enough," he answered. His partners spread out, circling us. "Old enough, you read me? Whaddya say?"

I smiled. "Oh, sure, you seem like a reasonable enough sort to me. Excuse me just a second." I held the baby down and out to Will, who extended his arms. "Can you handle this, Will?"

"Sure, Ben," Will said. He took the baby, jaw set, eyes fearful on the others.

I grinned. "Knew I could count on you, guy." Then I turned to the leader. "I suppose you got something lethal in that pocket, huh, bro?"

"Lethal enough."

"Mind if I see for myself?" I grabbed the kid's floppy white shirt collar and gave it a hundred-eighty degree twist, pulling him toward me roughly.

At the same time I thrust my other hand middle-knuckle deep into his pants pocket, gripped it hard, and tore it off.

The clasped switchblade clattered out onto the sidewalk, accompanied by a rain of change. I said, "Oh no, a deadly weapon," tightened my grip on his shirt collar, and gave him my best short-armed left jab, square on the nose.

He screamed through a spray of blood. I threw him back against the grocery store wall and faced the others just as one darted toward Will. He stopped in freezeframe. I fixed him with a stare. "You move one step closer to that child and I'll run you down and stomp you. I swear I will."

The leader wheezed and moaned on the sidewalk behind me. The punk ahead of me raised his hands and shrugged. I held my hands out to Will, who handed me the baby. I cuddled him against me and took Will's hand. "I better not see you later, gentlemen," I said, and led Will into the grocery.

The milk was no problem. Neither was the beer. The problem was my phone call, which I attempted from a public phone at the front of the store. The number kept ringing busy. I must have tried twenty times in ten minutes, with no success. Finally I got smart and looked

up the woman's last name—Evans—in the book. There was an Evans with the correct number at an address just a few blocks away. I'd just finished writing it down when I noticed a disturbance by the checkout counters.

A tall, clean-cut young blond guy was passing the checkouts, carrying a case of cigarette cartons toward the automatic doors. One of the bagboys straightened from his work, stared at him, then yelled, "Hey, stop! You haven't paid for that!"

The blond crouched into a trot, headed at maximum speed for the exit. The bagboy knocked aside a couple of old ladies and gave the blond a clumsy, full-body tackle. They went to the floor and the case of cigarettes hopped away, landing against a freestanding display of canned corn. The blond, stronger, more agile, more motivated, regained his leverage first and braced the slighter bagboy and throat-punched him. The bagboy gagged but did not relinquish his half-Nelson on the blond.

The crowd of customers and grocery employees stood frozen, shellshocked, gape-mouthed. One of the cashiers found her voice. "Somebody help him."

I was already handing the baby to Will, who had the presence of mind to hang on tight. I threw myself at the grappling



pair and slammed into the blond, managing to get a good grip on his longish hair. He kneed the bagboy back from him, slipped me easily, and came up with an uppercut to my chin that rang my gong with an almost audible sound. I went back and down, ass colliding hard with the unforgiving tile floor. The blond turned clumsily to make good his escape, but I managed to trip him, and he skidded down, sliding toward the door. He skittered up immediately, with all the advantage. I was headed up from all fours, firing up the rockets again, when the blond, unaccountably, came hurtling back past me into the vegetable display, sending it over with a crash of canned corn. He lay there, eyes open but unfocused, as I lurched to my feet and looked toward the entrance while the onlookers exhaled all at once.

There, grimacing with pain, rubbing his fist, stood the white-shirted kid from outside. His right-hand pants pocket flapped free where I'd ripped it. His nose was bent, his upper lip was black with drying blood, his eyes were pinched, but he grinned at me snottily. "Not bad, huh, bro?"

"Why?" I managed.

"My brother," he said, staring down at the moaning shop-lifter. "I've told him and *told* him not to commit no crimes."

Customers were moving all at once, most of them intent on escape. I went to Will and took the baby back as Will picked up the grocery bag. We met the punk at the door, and at my instructions Will gave him the six-pack of beer we'd bought.

The baby's address was on a narrow, curbless side street about six blocks from the store. I drove at a fast crawl, squinting at the house numbers in the near darkness. I wanted to be done with this. The baby had been pretty good so far, but he was starting to fuss and whine. Probably needed feeding or changing or something, damned if I could tell; I don't know nothing about babies, birthin' 'em or anything else.

Will perched on his knees on the bucket seat next to me, leaning forward, eyes intent. "We almost there, Ben?"

"Gotta be one of these on the right." I slowed. "Yep, that's it, praise be . . . oh, bloody hell!"

A boxy, silver Ford Escort wagon had backed out of the driveway and was tearing up the street away from me. I scanned the flat-roofed, single-story brick house it had left. The correct address, all right. No lights on. Place was deserted, and whoever lived there was taking off up the street in the Escort, nearly out of sight now.

"Buckle up, Will," I said grimly, popped the clutch, and gunned the engine.

The Escort was long out of sight, having rounded a corner. I followed as fast as I could, ignoring the 25-mph speed limit. I caught sight of it again as it made a right on a larger artery. By the time I made that corner, I had gained quite a bit. There were no cars between us. I began flashing my brights and honking my horn as I closed on the Escort, trying to catch its attention. Half a block ahead was a railroad crossing, and as we approached, the warning lights began to flash, the bells began to clang, and the blinking gates started down.

"Okay, Will, we got 'em cornered," I said.

The Escort slowed to a halt, then lurched left and started around the gate. Off to the right a dissonant train whistle blared. Some distance yet, but could be coming fast. As the Escort rolled onto the rails it twisted right to go around the other gate, but it never made it.

It stopped there, dead on the tracks, as I screeched to a halt at the crossing.

Over the rumbling of the Mustang motor I could hear the whine of the Escort's starter motor. The driver, apparently alone, hunched over the wheel. The train whistle issued again. I ripped open my door and

jumped out. "Stay put, Will," I hollered, then trotted toward the Escort as the driver climbed out clumsily.

She was a short young butterball with long black hair rubberbanded back into a pony tail. In the bleaching light of the Mustang's headlights her eyes were enormous, her face corpse-pale. "It needs a tuneup!" she wailed. "I've been meaning to get around to it!"

The train horn sounded again. I could smell gas. "Flooded. Get yourself off these tracks, Mrs. Evans."

She started toward me, blinking. "You know me?"

"No, but I've got your kid back there in the car." I went to the Escort and opened the driver's side door. "Other side of the tracks!" I snapped. "I can't push your car back the way you came."

She froze. "My baby! My little Charlie! How'd you—"

"Never mind." I reached into the Escort, fiddled the stick into neutral and, leaning on the doorframe, began to push.

"I want him!" she screamed. "Get him for me! My ex snatched him right out of the nursery—I'd left him alone for just a second—"

I released the car, having moved it about one foot. "Okay. You get yourself to the other side there, well back." I dodged the flashing gate and ran back

to the Mustang. Will had the passenger seat pulled forward, enabling me to squeeze the baby carrier out of the back. I ran back over the tracks to where Mrs. Evans waited. Tears as big as marbles ran down her round face as I handed her the baby. "Oh thank you, thank you," she sniffed, looking down at him. I was halfway back to the Escort when I heard her say, "Didn't you even *change* him?"

The train horn screamed and the engine's headlight caught me as it rounded a curve, churning hard. I resumed my position at the driver's side of the car and leaned with all my strength against the door-frame, rocking the car. Back and forth, back and forth, the train horn screamed again and the Escort broke loose and rolled off the tracks. I gave it one last vindictive push, then, as it rolled slowly to a stop on the other side, I dived headlong back over the tracks and under the gate, sliding hard on the coarse gravelly asphalt as the train, with one last vicious scream, reached the crossing.

I climbed clumsily to my feet and limped to the Mustang and fell in the driver's side. I was sore and scraped and revved up with adrenaline. Will for once paid no attention to the freight cars chugging by; he was beaming with admiration at me. "You beat the train!"

"Reckon so." I leaned back in the bucket seat and lighted a short cork-tipped cigar and smoked it silently as we waited, and waited, and waited. Finally the caboose came and went and the gates lifted. The young but-terball, and her baby, and her Escort, were gone. Naturally.

We'd almost reached Carole's house when, lo and behold, the gold Toyota appeared ahead of us.

Almost immediately I saw the driver backhand his companion across the face. She got hold of his free arm and bent to it and seemed to bite it. The Toyota swerved and nearly jumped the curb. I fell back from it, just to play it safe, and felt Will's eyes on me.

"Aren't you going to do something?" he asked hesitantly.

"Nope."

Will looked ahead at the Toyota, then back at me. "But they're fighting."

"Let 'em." I glanced at him. "We done took care of our share of problems, Will. For one night, anyhow."

The Toyota made a sudden left-hand turn from the right-hand lane and disappeared. A few seconds later Will broke the silence.

"I was scared."

"Really? Sure didn't act like it."

"That little . . . and the man

in the bathroom . . . and those bad men at the store . . .”

I swerved into the parking lot of a Jesse James convenience store, parked, reached out a hand and squeezed his shoulder roughly. “They couldn’t hurt us,” I said. “I wouldn’t let them.”

“I was scared.”

I breathed deeply, searching for simple words. “What it is, Will, is, there’s bad people all over the place. Always have been, always will be. Don’t ask me why, I’m not that smart. But what I do know is that if you’re lucky enough to be big and strong and halfway bright, you got a duty to stop the bad people and help the good people because a lot of the good people aren’t strong enough to be able to help themselves.”

“I was scared.”

I looked at him for a long moment. “Well, so was I.” I grinned. “The trick is never to let anyone realize it.”

Carole, face dark and unreadable, met us at the door. We trooped past her into the living room. The game show was, of course, long over. And from the looks of the VCR it was clear that Carole hadn’t taped the bonus round for me. Rats.

“So what’s the story, fel-

lows?” Carole asked finally.

“Had to get gas,” I answered.

“Stuck by a train, too,” the carefully coached Will said.

“You’ve been gone a whole hour, fellows,” Carole said in her patented glass-cutter tone.

“Just another boring errand,” I said airily, and went into the kitchen to put the milk away. When I returned to the living room, Will was sitting on the couch next to his mother, holding his book. “Can you read this to me now, Ben?”

*The Fly Went By* again. “Read it? I feel like we just *lived* it.”

“What?” Carole asked darkly.

“Later, Carole, okay? Later.”

I sat down and read Will the book. After that we put Will to bed. Back in the living room, I assumed the position in the La-Z-Boy and stretched my legs and lighted a cigar, trying to get interested in a New York City private detective with no visible means of support. Carole disappeared into the kitchen, came back with a hefty shot of Jack Daniels Black, handed it to me, then sat on the couch, crossed her legs, crossed her arms, smiled with utter certainty and said: “Spill it, Ben.”

Here goes nothing. I began the story, keeping it light and casual, hoping she’d still be speaking to me when I finished.

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FICTION

# Algorithm 512

by John H. Dirckx



Illustration by Ted Burner

18

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The restaurant where I was supposed to meet Dr. Pandalius was hot and crowded, the air heavy with the smell of Polish and Hungarian cuisine. It was a family restaurant—paper napkins, coat-hooks at the end of each booth, too many children.

I'd seen Pandalius several times at the medical center and had no difficulty picking him out as he sat alone in a booth, demolishing a plate of sausage and fried potatoes with morose determination.

I slid onto the bench opposite him. "Evening, Dr. Pandalius."

"Who knows you're here?" he asked, not looking up, hardly breaking the rhythm of his chewing. He ate like a machine, slashing his sausage into thin wafers with a steak knife and dipping each wafer into a mound of ground horseradish before shoveling it into his mouth.

"You said not to mention our meeting to anybody. I didn't. Why the spy thriller stuff?"

He looked at me for the first time, his dark eyes flashing beneath tufted gray brows. "How old are you, Mr. Wildish?"

"Forty-one."

"Ever had any heart trouble? Chest pain on exertion? After meals? In cold weather? Shortness of breath when you lie flat?" He rattled off the questions in a dull monotone, as he

probably did a hundred times a week in his consulting room.

Twenty-seven years before, he'd founded the Newbury Medical Center as a neighborhood clinic. Now it was an enormous corporate empire with its own insurance program, the Newbury Plan, by which I was employed. Since I'd assumed that our meeting had to do with the Plan, his questions about my personal health took me off guard and made me wonder if he had all his marbles.

"I feel fine," I said. "I'm scheduled for my annual physical at the center next week."

He finished his meal and pushed his plate aside. His hands were scrupulously clean but otherwise looked like those of a mechanic—thick, blunt fingers with broad nails, giving an impression of strength rather than dexterity. "Do the names William Sentry and Gustave Roche mean anything to you?" he asked.

"The Plan paid off a life insurance policy on Roche within the past few weeks."

"Also on Sentry. They both had physicals not long before they died. Dangerous undertaking, having a physical."

"Are you trying to talk me out of having mine?" My grin drew no answering flicker of humor from his massive Slavic face.

"Sentry and Roche were both rich, influential twerps. Reactionaries. Obstructionists. Red-necks. Their deaths were remarkably convenient for a whole lot of people."

"You're serious, aren't you?"

"I think they were murdered, Mr. Wildish. With statistics."

"I don't get it."

"When Rod Lovat hired you, I asked him why we needed a claims analyst and he said it was to prevent unpleasant surprises. You have access to records that even I can't get at, and you know computers. You're going to have to sort this out for yourself. If you draw blank, then you draw blank."

"Aren't you even going to give me any hints?"

Instead of answering, he ordered pie and coffee for both of us and went to the men's room. When my pie was gone I slewed sideways in my seat and started watching the door to the men's room. A kid came out who looked as if he should be going in, his face the same shade of green as his sweater. There was a lot of commotion then—people running, people yelling, an ambulance, and police. Some said Pandalius had fallen, others thought he'd been struck. All agreed he was dead.

I stayed out of it, but somebody had to pick up the tab. I paid cash so that my presence

there couldn't be traced later. Since the waitress had addressed Pandalius by name, he was probably a regular at the restaurant. If he'd been murdered, the murderer might have been laying for him there without any knowledge of our clandestine appointment.

The next day, which was Sunday, I went to the office around one in the afternoon. Nearly everything was shut down but there was a clerk in the computer room, whom I knew as Janice, having a cigarette with her chewing gum while posting records.

"Hey, Mr. Wildish, did you hear about Dr. Pandalius?"

"Terrible thing. Do these terminals have full access today?"

"Believe it or not, Dr. Pandalius didn't belong to the Plan himself," she said, replying to my thought rather than my words. Or what she thought was my thought.

I looked up Gustave Roche and William Sentry. I couldn't get at their medical records, but I found itemized statements of services received under the Plan. I couldn't remember Sentry's first name and there were four Sentries in the computer, but only one of them was dead. Both Roche and Sentry had died within hours after having heart surgery for coronary disease. They'd both had bypass grafts

performed by Cletus Barbault, a cardiovascular surgeon who was so good that people from out of state joined the Plan just to have him operate on them.

As Pandalius had said, both Roche and Sentry had had physicals at the medical center during the past few months. That must have been how their coronary disease had first been spotted. Confirmation of the diagnosis and the decision to operate had apparently been based on X-ray studies with dye injected into the coronary arteries. Both men's physicals had been done by Pandalius himself.

There was nothing in the computer about the public lives of these two men—nothing to supply the motives for murder that Pandalius had suggested. Roche was a manufacturing executive and Sentry had been in labor and politics. For further details I'd have to look at a newspaper file, and none would be accessible, at least to me, until the next day.

According to Monday morning's paper, the police were convinced Pandalius had been murdered. They were looking for a tall thin man with shaggy blond hair who had dined with him and paid his check. I was in a barber shop before lunchtime. If it was murder, the chances were a thousand to one

that the killer's motive had been to keep Pandalius from blowing the whistle on whatever method had been used to engineer the deaths of Roche and Sentry. When it became known that I'd been at the restaurant with him, I could be next on the hit list.

I found plenty on the two dead men at the newspaper office. As Pandalius had said, both of them had been stubborn, abrasive crackpots. Roche's death had smoothed the way for a much-needed merger that he'd been blocking for four years. With Sentry out of the way, a new regime in local government had assumed control without encountering opposition of the type he'd been famous for.

I spent most of Monday afternoon ignoring the mound of files in the tray on my desk and trying to remember exactly what Pandalius had said to me.

"Mr. Bernard Wildish?" They were in my office before I knew it, two detectives in dark suits—one to do the talking, the other to watch and listen and learn.

"Yes?"

The one that talked showed me identification. His name was Nolte. "I believe you met Dr. Pandalius by appointment on Saturday evening at Painter's Restaurant."

"That's right."

"Did you make the appointment or did he?"

"He did."

"Was it a social engagement, or business?"

"Business, I guess you'd say."

"Well, was it business or wasn't it?" He impressed me as a basically gentle person trying to act tough, a man with a trusting nature doing his best to appear skeptical and cynical.

"Pandalius called me and said he wanted to see me. I'd barely sat down when he went to the men's room and got killed."

"Anybody else in on this meeting?"

"No."

"Did you go into that men's room?"

"Never."

"Are you in computers?"

"Not exactly. We use computers to store and run data analyses. I'm not a programmer, if that's what you mean."

"Does the word 'algorithm' mean anything to you?"

"Sure. An algorithm is a step-by-step breakdown of a computer operation. Sort of a decision tree. At each step there are at least two choices—say 'yes' or 'no'—so the tree keeps branching."

"Did you and Pandalius talk about algorithms on Saturday?"

"No. Why?"

Detective Nolte took out a

piece of paper and laid it on my desk, keeping one finger on the corner. It read, "Wildish—Painter's—7:30 Sat—algorithm 512."

"Make any sense to you?"

"Absolutely none."

"Why haven't you come forward and made a statement?"

"About what? I told you, I'd barely sat down with Pandalius when he went off and got killed."

"Mind making one now? Downtown?"

"I guess not. Am I under arrest?"

His only answer was a smirk and a sniff. We went in their car.

It took longer than I had expected, and toward the end they got ugly. Pandalius hadn't been robbed, and it was pretty obvious he hadn't been the chance victim of a homicidal maniac, either. My reticence during the first two days of the investigation made the police both suspicious and hostile toward me. They couldn't believe I had no idea what Pandalius wanted to see me about, and I was too afraid of sharing his fate to tell them what little I did know. In the circumstances, a repetition of our brief conversation was bound to sound cockeyed and fabricated, and that was all the more reason why it would probably get into the papers where the killer would see it.



Had Pandalius suggested that particular restaurant, or had I? Had I dined there before? Did I know Pandalius's brother? His wife? Had I ever transacted any private business with him? When it was all over, they'd told me more than I'd told them. They already knew I was at the restaurant with Pandalius, but I hadn't previously been aware that he wanted to tell me something about algorithm 512. I still didn't know what it was, but I figured if I put it together with the few remarks he'd made before getting killed, I should be able to learn what he suspected or knew about those two deaths.

The idea that a computer algorithm had somehow been used to kill two men would have seemed like pure science fiction to me if Pandalius himself hadn't been murdered while trying to tell me about it. And I felt I owed it to the old man to follow up on his hint as far as I could without getting myself knocked off, too.

At the Newbury Medical Center, an avant-garde institution with birthing rooms, a psychiatric unit on the cottage hospital plan, and a hospice for the dying perched like a ski lodge on a wooded hill overlooking the rest of the complex, I was just another Plan member, with no standing what-

ever. But that was where Roche and Sentry had died, and that was where I had to dig. I spent two afternoons roaming the corridors with what I hoped was a purposeful look in my eye and asking selected persons pointed questions about computer operations. By the end of the second day it was obvious that this style of investigation would yield nothing except maybe an eventual run-in with Security. A more logical approach seemed to be just to wait a couple of days and take my routine annual physical, as scheduled. That way I could retrace Roche's and Sentry's footsteps—preferably not all the way to the morgue—without arousing anyone's suspicion or alarm.

When I reported for my appointment, the physical examination section was already operating in full swing, whipping people from one numbered station to another with the brisk efficiency of a well-oiled machine. By the end of the day fifty patients would have had complete physical examinations administered by a team of doctors, nurses, technicians, clerks—and computers.

An examinee entering the section could choose either to go over his medical history with a live physician or to "interface" with a computer. The machine didn't actually talk; that would

be next year. It spelled out questions on a screen (HAVE YOU EVER FAINTED? HAVE YOU EVER COUGHED UP BLOOD? ARE WE GOING TOO FAST?) and the person being interviewed would respond by punching a few keys—YES, NO, DON'T KNOW, and so forth.

I decided I'd better choose the computer. I wasn't sure Roche and Sentry had done so, but it seemed probable. The four small, cosy computer history booths were drawing a major share of the business, while at least one of the history-taking doctors was always idle. It had already occurred to me that a medical history program would involve lots of algorithms. If the patient says he's never coughed up blood, there's no point in the computer's going on to ask him when and how much. On the other hand, if he says he has coughed up blood, then a whole series of related issues have to be pursued.

An amiable but impersonal young woman—clerk? nurse? doctor?—nobody wore white here—showed me to a booth, inserted my plastic Newbury Plan card into the slot in the terminal, and explained the procedure. The card, which contained everything from my blood type to my latest electrocardiogram in microfiche, would ensure that my answers to the

computer's questions would go directly into my medical record in the main computer.

The lights in the booth dimmed and all my attention was focused on the amber screen before me. GOOD MORNING, MR. WILDISH, AND WELCOME TO THE NEWBURY MEDICAL CENTER PHYSICAL EXAMINATION FACILITY. The first questions were merely a review and updating of my past medical history, details of which were already known to the computer. In spite of my efforts to relax, I found myself hunching forward in my seat as if I were watching a suspense film on television in the middle of the night. And after a while I realized what the suspense was all about.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD OR BEEN TOLD THAT YOU HAD HEART DISEASE? DO YOU GET PAINS IN YOUR CHEST AFTER PHYSICAL EXERCISE? AFTER MEALS? IN COLD WEATHER? DO YOU GET SHORT OF BREATH WHEN YOU LIE FLAT? I could almost see Dr. Pandalius scowling at me over his plate of sausage as he tripped through the questions. The keyboard was built into an adjustable and plushly upholstered armrest. I punched the NO button in reply to each of these inquiries, but the computer seemed disposed to cavil. ACCORDING TO YOUR LAST HISTORY, YOU HAD OCCASIONAL CHEST PAIN AFTER

MEALS. HAS THIS HAPPENED IN THE PAST YEAR? The question reminded me of the unanswerable "Have you stopped beating your wife?" I was perfectly certain I hadn't given such a history last year.

No, I hadn't had any chest pain after meals. The computer wasn't satisfied. Round and round we went in a barely civil dialogue in which nothing I said was quite right. No cross-examining lawyer ever twisted a witness's words into such a labyrinth of contradictions. By the time the computer moved on to the subject of my dietary habits and digestive functions, I was drenched in a cold sweat and firmly convinced that I had met and been mastered by algorithm 512.

From the history booth I moved on to a dressing room and then into a small, brightly lit examining room, where a Dr. Stere was waiting for me with a printout of the history I'd just had bludgeoned out of me. Before and during the exam he said little, but I noticed that he went over my heart with great thoroughness and deliberation. Much later, after I'd had a cardiogram, a chest X-ray, blood tests, and examinations of my vision, hearing, and breathing, I sat down with the doctor to review the findings.

"Everything here looks fine

to me, Mr. Wildish," he said, spreading out a sheaf of reports on the desk. "All your examinations and tests are normal. The only point of concern is that discomfort you sometimes have in your chest after eating or exertion."

"That's not really—"

"I know it doesn't bother you very much or very often, but it could be an early warning signal, and we'd be remiss if we didn't follow it up. Your resting cardiogram is normal, but I want to schedule you for a treadmill test so we can see what your heart does under a measured amount of stress. After that we can decide whether there's any cause for concern."

Had this suave, disciplined young clinician ever heard of algorithm 512? I reflected that Pandalius himself had apparently been misled by it while doing physicals on Roche and Sentry, and had only later begun to suspect mischief.

I went in for my treadmill test the next afternoon. Even though I was convinced there wasn't anything wrong with my heart, I wasn't particularly surprised when the cardiologist supervising the test stopped it in the middle and had me lie down and rest for nearly an hour while they kept the monitor running. Eventually Dr.

Stere and the cardiologist came in together and told me I'd flunked the test. There was no evidence of damage to my heart muscle but it seemed likely that I had some narrowing in one or more of my coronary arteries. They felt the next step should be X-rays of my coronaries with dye injected through a tube in my aorta.

More and more, my experience at Newbury Medical Center was looking like a replay of Roche's and Sentry's last days on earth. It dawned on me that, if there wasn't really anything wrong with my heart, I was up against a monster of chilling and awesome dimensions. At what point did my role as guinea pig cease to be calculated risk-taking and turn into suicidal folly? I'm no hero. I got out of there as soon as I could get my shirt buttoned, telling them I'd be back in touch with them later.

It was with a sense of considerable urgency that I planned my next move. If I was slated for elimination, they'd eventually get me one way or another. Pandalius, grown too wise for algorithm 512, had succumbed to the traditional blunt instrument. But I didn't have enough evidence to go to the police yet. I needed to see the complete medical records on the two men Pandalius had thought were

murdered and compare their last history interviews with my own.

I could have tapped into the records computer from one of our terminals at the Plan office if only I had known the access code, but I didn't know it and I was afraid to ask. By now I was ready to suspect everyone, even clerical personnel, of complicity in some diabolical plot of incalculable vastness. The only person associated with the medical center or the Plan who'd earned my absolute confidence was Pandalius, and he would drop no more hints.

Still, he might have left some notes or memoranda that would be of use to me. Backing that hunch, I called his wife, whom I'd never met. I told her frankly that I was the last person to see her husband alive except for his killer, and asked if I could visit her at home. She wasn't exactly cordial—why should she be?—but she finally agreed to see me that same evening around seven.

The ash blonde who admitted me to the Pandalius's Valley Village condo was much younger than the doctor. In a quiet cigarette contralto she invited me into the sunken living room and offered me a drink, which I declined.

"I'm sorry to break in on you at a time like this," I said, "but

it's something that can't wait. Just before your husband died, he told me he thought something was—wrong at the medical center. I think he was killed to keep him from saying any more. I feel I owe it to him—”

“You weren't at the funeral, were you?” she asked, as if that somehow stood against me in my bid for her trust and help.

“No. Dr. Pandalius and I were barely acquainted.”

“Yet you say he came to you with this problem or whatever it was?”

“Yes. As I explained on the phone, I work at the Plan office as a statistician. The doctor seemed to think that because of my position I'd be able to gather evidence in support of his suspicions, but so far I haven't done very well. I'm hoping you'll let me look over his papers—”

The expression on her face was about as subtle as a slammed door. “You'd have to talk to the lawyers about that,” she said. “The police took some of Karl's things and haven't brought them back yet. Rod Lovat took away two boxes of papers. Maybe you should talk to him.”

Rodman Lovat had started as administrator of Dr. Pandalius's first clinic. Over the years he'd risen to a vice-presidency in the Plan and a seat on the board of directors, and incidentally he

was my boss. I wasn't ready to go to him with this yet. Mrs. Pandalius and I talked a bit more, but I saw clearly enough that I was fishing in the wrong pond and soon took myself off.

In the guest parking lot behind the condo, where I'd left my car, the shadows were already thick. I was putting the key into the lock when I realized someone was standing close beside me.

“Going my way, Mr. Wil-dish?” The voice was both guttural and sibilant and I recognized it even before the car door swung open and the light from inside showed the squat figure and dimpled round face. I'd never heard him called anything but Hop, which I assumed was a nickname referring to his limp. He was a member of the medical center staff, not a doctor but something to do with maintenance, I thought. He served as a standby interpreter for German- and Polish-speaking visitors to the Plan office, and that's where I'd met him.

His left hand closed over my right wrist with a grip like a pipe wrench. “Get in,” he said. Just briefly, he showed me the small dark pistol in his right hand. Had he been at the restaurant the night Pandalius was killed? I didn't remember seeing him there.

I drove, numbly aware of the menace in the shadows at my side. Hop spoke only to give directions. Leaving Valley Village, we took the most direct route up Mount Orange, came out on the Serena Skyway, and stopped at a scenic parking spot that was deserted except for one car facing toward the sunset across the guard rail. Rodman Lovat was in the car. Even from a distance his Mephistophelean profile, complete with neatly trimmed goatee, was unmistakable.

I parked next to him. Hop got into the back seat of my car and Lovat replaced him in the front seat. "Wildish, you put your nose in the wrong place" was the first thing he said to me. Always impeccably dressed, he had a crisp, overly precise way of talking, so that even when he used slang he made it sound like a quotation from Scripture. "I don't know exactly what Pandalius might have told you before he died, but your prying and meddling are threatening the very existence of something that's just too big to be wiped out by a bungler like you."

I kept my gaze directed forward, trying to forget the man in the back with the gun. The setting sun threw an angry red flush over banks of clouds near the horizon and stained the roofs in the valley a hundred

tints of crimson, ochre, and gold. Here and there the river glinted among patches of woods already dark. The traffic on the Skyway was thin. Only an occasional car flashed by in my rear view mirror, the drivers too intent on their own worries to notice what was happening in a wayside parking area.

"You're awfully quiet, Wildish," said Lovat. "What's happened to all that curiosity?"

I said nothing, but he seemed under some compulsion to talk. What could I do but listen?

"The Newbury Plan," he said, straightening the crease of his right trouser leg with elaborate care, "is a gold mine to the stockholders and directors. You know that as well as anybody. But some of us in the Plan have acquired a taste for something beyond money. Power, Wildish, boundless power—the capacity to control people, to pull strings and make things happen exactly the way we want them to happen. Have you any idea how much raw sewage is stored in the memory bank at the medical center? Under the cloak of professional secrecy, even the most tight-lipped people will spill their guts to a doctor. And they're even less reserved when they're talking to a computer terminal. But the computer has never been built that can keep a secret from anybody who

discovers the magic word.

"A few years ago a colleague and I discovered a novel way of using that stored medical information—not for direct financial gain but to coerce a couple of people on a committee to cast deciding ballots in an election. There was no mention of the Plan, just discreet telephone messages threatening exposure of politically and socially damaging secrets. From that small beginning we've developed into an operation of statewide influence. Because, you see, the power to coerce is a marketable commodity. We place it at the service of the highest bidder. And meanwhile, enrollment in the Plan keeps increasing. The time has come when we can exert pressure on an influential minority, if not a majority, of nearly every committee, every board of trustees, every jury in the city.

"But there are always a few men too stubbornly moral to be corrupted, like Pandalius, or too stupid to know where their best interests lie, like you."

A youth wearing a set of headphones wired to a box on his belt stopped a few feet from the car to adjust the chain of his bicycle. I squirmed restlessly and tried to catch his eye, but he was facing the other way. Something cold and hard just touched the back of my neck.

"Have you and Klaus been introduced?" asked Lovat. "Klaus Hoepfiring, Ben Wildish. Klaus has a degree in electrical engineering but I think he probably taught his professors more than they taught him. He can make anything but roses and fix anything but a smashed light bulb."

The car shook as Hoepfiring shifted his squat bulk in the back seat. "A smashed light bulb would be a long job," he conceded. The boy on the bike pedaled away.

"Klaus has enabled us to add a whole new dimension to our operation. Some day he may win a Nobel Prize for his work on the cardiopulmonary simulator. That's a monitor programmed to imitate the signs of the disease and used to instruct and test physicians and nurses in training. Klaus's simulator has given us a means of dealing with people who are above or beyond moral persuasion.

"At the medical center, as in any modern hospital, medicine is practiced largely by machines. Since all data are filtered through computers and other electronic devices, there are plenty of opportunities for selection and alteration. It's perfectly simple to arrange an abnormal treadmill test, as you yourself can witness, by manip-



ulating the input of a monitor. It's equally simple to create the realistic appearance of shock or heart stoppage in an unconscious patient in intensive care or the recovery room. As a result, dose after dose of powerful medication will be administered intravenously, according to standard protocol, but with lethal results. So far we've limited the method to patients recovering from coronary artery bypass grafts. That's an inherently risky operation, and Dr. Barbault's results are so good that an occasional extra death raises no eyebrows."

Finally I saw what Dr. Pandalius had meant when he said that Roche and Sentry were murdered with statistics.

"Before surgery, each patient has an X-ray study of the coronary arteries that shows narrowing or blockage, thanks to the artistry of an associate of ours in the radiology department. The problem of getting perfectly healthy men to undergo treadmill testing and coronary arteriography was neatly solved by Nikki Pandalius. She was a psychologist at the medical center before she married Pandalius. She devised a closed-loop program for the history interview—"

"Algorithm 512," I said. My mouth was so dry I could barely croak out the words.

"So he had found out about it. Algorithm five-one-two, guaranteed to extract, from nine men out of ten, a history of chest pain coming on after exertion or meals, a cardinal symptom of coronary artery disease. Once plant that seed in the mind of the examining physician, and the rest follows automatically. That doctor won't rest until the patient has had a cardiogram, a treadmill test, and a coronary arteriogram. For him, those are the limits of reality, the parameters on which he bases his diagnostic and treatment decisions. And if we decide to modify those parameters, with an occasional stray signal sent through a wire that nobody notices among so many other wires, the patient is on a fast track to the cemetery. You were on that track yourself but you chose to get off. Pity. It would have been a lot less painful than the way you're going to go. Cleaner, too.

"Tomorrow, or whenever they find your body, the coroner will try to gain access to your medical records. And after a fitting display of reluctance, the medical center will release them, including a fabricated psychiatric history of despondency and suicidal ideation. Get out of the car, Wildish. No, leave the keys."

The sun had nearly set. Down

in the valley, thousands of lights twinkled out of a blue-gray haze. A cool wind whipped my coattails and chilled my sweat-soaked body. Hoepfring took my arm with his bone-crushing grip and propelled me toward the guard rail. On the other side of the rail was a five foot strip of weed-grown rocks and then a sheer drop of a hundred fifty feet to a rail cutting. Like a stubborn child, I hooked one foot around the rail, but Hoepfring easily dragged me across, pulling off my shoe and gouging my ankle to the bone.

I clawed wildly at him, heedless of his gun. As I looked back toward Lovat, still sitting imperturbably in my car, I noticed that the boy on the bike had come back. Twisting away from Hoepfring, I let out an inarticulate whoop. And then I saw, in the fast-fading afterglow, that, fantastically, impossibly, the cyclist was the younger of the two detectives who'd visited me at the office and grilled me for hours at headquarters. He had a gun in his hand and he was running along the guard rail, crouching low and jabbering frantically into a microphone that must have been

hidden in his clothes. From somewhere in the distance I heard an approaching siren. Hoepfring heard it too and made one last half-hearted effort to throw me over—which nearly succeeded—before scrambling back over the rail.

Rodman Lovat was getting out of my car with ungraceful haste when a police cruiser pulled up screaming and scattering gravel. For a while things seemed hopelessly confused. Hoepfring managed to throw away his gun before the troops closed in and at first they took him for the victim. Later I learned that the detective who saved my life had been tailing me for a week. The police suspected from the first that Mrs. Pandalius had hired me to kill her husband, and my visit to her had just about convinced them.

I still work for the Plan, under a new boss, but I don't go to the medical center any more when I get sick. I've found a nice old fashioned family doctor who practices medicine with his bare hands. I don't believe he's ever heard of an algorithm. He can't find anything wrong with my heart.

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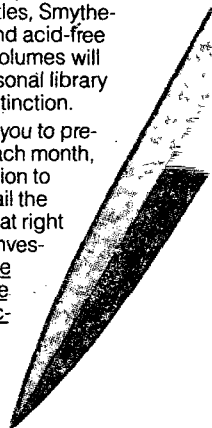
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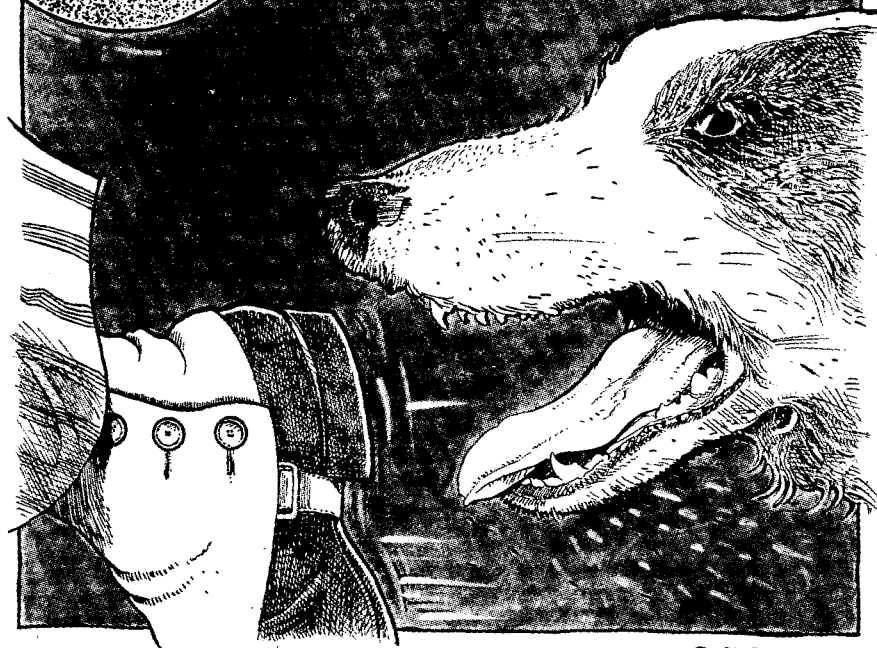
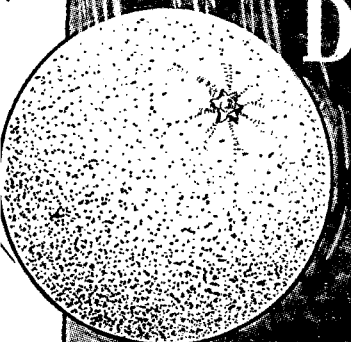


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FICTION

# The Singular Incident of the Dog on the Beach

by Avram Davidson



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Illustration by Jim Ceribello

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**S**itting here in the sunshine and looking at my orange trees, I know there was no way I could have stayed in that awful English climate. But there I was, just gotten off the train in what they call Paddington Station, London, and my arm hurting something bad; however, I tried not to scratch it. A station official gave me pretty clear directions to a nearby doctor, so off I went and in I went. Took off my coat, rolled up my sleeve, lit my pipe as much to distract my mind as because I wanted a smoke, and waited. And waited.

And waited. No sign of the servant who had let me in, but by and by I heard men's voices, and called out. In came two men.

"I hope you haven't had a long wait," said one. Burly fellow. "My friend and I are just at the point of leaving. But Dr. Anstruther, round the corner, or Dr. Jackson, down the street, will be pleased to attend to you on my behalf."

"I had understood that your office hours were going on now, sir."

He gave a look at his companion—a tall, spare, limber man—and said, "Well, well, yes, but, ah, you see—well, Jones?"

"Well, what, sir? Let's just have a look. Hm." It was just a look he gave me. And then he said . . . and then he said this . . . all this: "Your arm has a bad case of creeping eruption which you no doubt picked up on the beach in Florida where the dog was. It must itch badly and no doubt has much bothered you all the way from Liverpool, and may even have bothered you while you were grafting the sweet oranges on to the bitter orange root stock."

Many years as a poker player had given me control of my face. Merely I asked, what made him say all that?

He smiled. "Your clothes, my dear sir, are American-cut. Your hip pocket sags, as though it had long carried the weight of a pistol or revolver; this is not the usual custom here in the United Kingdom, although, I believe, far from uncommon in the United States . . . though, I understand, far less common in the northern than in the southern states. The raised weal of the concentric circle on your arm is certainly that of creeping eruption, an infection often picked up on a tropical or subtropical beach, where the parasite is evidently carried by dogs. Your clothing, if you will pardon me, has a definite tang of pine wood, and it is not the season when our timber merchants receive their Baltic pine. And although your trousers have been brushed, hotel servants are often careless, and there are still some slight traces of the unmistakable mud of the Merseyside, where the timber-boats from Florida often put in. Is



there not in your pipe tobacco the aromatic herb, deertongue, a product of the Florida forest? Do I not observe that a drop of the sap of the orange tree has fallen on your sleeve and dried? And had you been cutting down sweet orange trees because they had become infected with the disease to which they are, alas, prone, you would surely have taken off your coat so as to swing the axe more freely. And—"

And in another minute he would have reminded me that we certainly do graft sweet orange onto the bitter orange root stock which is so much more resistant. I said, "And my arm, sir? My poor afflicted arm? Is nothing to be done for it?"

They had the gaslight on, and barely noon; and they needed it on, too. This fellow—Jones?—gave a slight shrug. "Well, sir, surgery, even minor surgery, is out of my line. I would suppose that my medical friend here would wish to numb the skin and subcutaneous tissue with applications of ice, and then use the lancet—one, two, three—to excise the tiny parasite which has caused the trouble; eh, doctor, what, sir?"

The doctor said, somewhat shortly, somewhat ruefully, that he had no ice. "I never have ice. I should advise him to go see Creevey, at St. Stowe's. Creevey is by way of being somewhat of a specialist in tropical medicine and surgery, removal of the guinea worm, and such. St. Stowe's is very well-furnished, very up-to-date, and has an ice machine. Meanwhile let me put on a soothing ointment, and try not to scratch—Eh? No charge, no. The servant will let you out, my friend and I must be on our way, now; pray excuse haste."

His friend had already forgotten me. I heard him say, as they went out, something which has stuck in my mind forever. But I did go to St. Stowe's, by way of what they call a four-wheeler; the other kind of cab, the hansom, has only two. Huge place, St. Stowe's! In came a heavy-bodied, short-legged man: stamp-stamp-stamp: this was Mr. Creevey, the surgeon. He scarcely listened to me.

"Dr. Who? Never mind, don't signify. Eh? 'Creeping eruption?' I daresay; be glad it's not guinea-worm! Eh? 'Ice,' what do you want ice for, do you think this is a lolly-shop, this is a surgery, we don't serve ices here! Dresser! Scrub down that arm! Dresser! A clean lancet! One-two-three: *there!* All over. Dresser! Patch him up! 'Day!'" Stamp-stamp-stamp; exit Mr. Creevey the surgeon.

The dresser said, "If you feel faint, sir, put your head between your knees while I set this carbolized bandage on your arm. You are lucky to have had one of the foremost up-and-coming men in

this hospital, sir. In London, sir. D'you like London, sir? *I don't.* Coming from our dispensary at Gravesend this morning I saw that new ship, the *Ballarat*, starting to get up steam; if I had a purse of gold I'd be off like a shot and aboard her. Ah, sunshine!"

Wonder what the man's name was; the dresser, I mean. He put the idea in my head, and an hour later my satchel and I were in the steam launch, heading down river for the *Ballarat*.

Doothit had had no business sicking his dog on me or pulling that pistol when I bashed the critter. It was Doothit who'd shot the bank cashier, not me; I never wanted him shot. I only wanted my fair share of the gold, but things being the way they turned out, why, I took Doothit's share, too. It came in handy while waiting for my new-planted trees to bear. I took a new name here, to go with my new life; they are used to that sort of thing here, anyway. And I raise as good oranges in Queensland as ever I did in Florida.

It's not that I think too much about the past, but just that just now this little bitty old scar on my arm reminded me. That first doctor back in England—his name . . . what . . . what? No matter. I even kind of forget his face. Funny way to neglect a medical practice, running off from patients because a friend says, *such* an odd thing to say! "Quick, what, sir! The game's afoot!"

But I don't forget his friend's face, though. Sharp as a hatchet and just as keen. Yes! *Very* keen! And *very* smart! What a beautiful system of logical deductions he had, too. Look what he smelled out about me in a few seconds. Good thing I lit right out for Australia and never came back there, or he might soon have smelled it all out. Yes, he likely might right soon have smelled it all out. I know his methods.

# Foiling a Femme Fatale

by Lawrence Doorley



Hank Blaustein 1986

**I**t was Happy Hour, four o'clock of a scorching midsummer afternoon at Tranquility Haven Retirement Village down in Florida, and gloom hung heavy. Misery loving company, Helen, Betty, Polly, Susie, and Marge, five widows in their middle to late sixties (one of them claimed to be barely past sixty, but we know better, the dear girl) were seated at a circular plastic table in the rumpus room. Glumly sipping their drinks—brought with them from their condos—they were, as usual, killing time, listlessly talking of nothing important, moping their lives away.

There were other groups scattered around the room, seventy to seventy-five percent couples, the remainder unattached members of the weaker sex, widows all. Now and then a shrill shriek smote the surroundings—likely a devilish septuagenarian from Ohio telling an off-color story—but for the most part the atmosphere was subdued, a fairly typical Happy Hour.

It had been, and still was, a brutally hot summer even for southern Florida, and spirits had drooped even more than usual (air conditioning is great, but one hates to stay cooped up all the time). And there had been ten deaths—seven men, three women—in the four beatifically named buildings—Elysium, Olympia, Eden, Hesperides—that made up the retirement complex. Also five poor souls had been carted off to nursing homes.

Tranquility Haven looked great in the brochures: four impressive three story buildings, palm trees, flowering shrubs, a large swimming pool, badminton and tennis courts, happy couples waving gaily at other couples as they dashed excitedly to the next stimulating event on the program. Everyone looked in perfect health, not a day over forty-five, forty-seven at the most. A busy, bustling place, Tranquility Haven looked like paradise. Ah, but up close it was a melancholy place for lots of the retirees, with grey hair, arthritis, sundry ills and ailments, and loneliness in dismal quantities. To add to the general disconsolateness, the radio music, "Golden Oldies," that wafted through the complex was sponsored by the Sunrise Funeral Home.

Ten minutes or so after Happy Hour had begun on this particular afternoon, there scurried into view a little wrinkled creature in a black dress, Bad News Nelly (actually Eleanor Greaves from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Mr. Greaves gone these past three years). Nelly, like many of the retirees, had a hobby. Some were into ceramics, painting, woodwork, poetry, volunteer work at the local library or at one of the nearby hospitals. Nelly's hobby was bad news. She kept track of deaths, mishaps, life's big and little travails, concentrating on the hundred and fifty or so occupants of the retirement complex but also keeping a close ear on calamities nationwide and worldwide. Poor Nelly's first duty every morning, even before the coffee was done brewing, was to scrutinize carefully the obituary columns in the local paper. The rest of the day she spent listening to the bad news on TV and hustling around the complex, gathering dismal data.

The girls, our five winsome widows, never called Bad News that to her face. They wouldn't do that. They were all basically kind, compassionate individuals, churchgoers all. Four of them had grandchildren—all brilliant, superior, way above average—whom they adored, and the fifth, childless in a long, happy marriage, had adopted two little Ethiopian children, Abdul and Minny, for whose care and upbringing she contributed twenty dollars a month to an international fund.

Kindness, compassion, Abdul, Minny, all that, are mentioned to emphasize the fact that we are dealing with five everyday grandmothers, exactly like anyone's well-preserved grandmother. These are dear, frisky, young-olds. They are not spring chickens nor are they old wattled turkeys. But it would be stupid to say that none of our five would hurt a fly. They were all pretty tough cookies.

Anyway, as mentioned, poor old Bad News has scurried into view at Happy Hour.

"Oh, oh, girls, look out," warned Marge under her breath. "Here comes Bad News, and from the look of her it's all over. We might as well burn our credit cards; the end is near. Repent ye sinners."

There was no time for even a short, quick snicker at Marge's remarks, for Bad News, bubbling over with gloom and doom, had reached their table. Hurriedly pulling up a chair, gingerly easing her creaky old bones into it—osteoporosis, the poor soul—she spoke in funereal lilt.

"I don't suppose you girls have heard?"

No, they hadn't heard. All eyes were on Bad News, the worst was feared.

"It's poor Ann Watson, from your building," announced Bad News, all atwitter with woe and rue. "Gone to her Maker three hours ago at St. Luke's in town, the poor soul . . . what a shame, only fifty-eight . . . and so suddenly. . . . Why, you girls know it was only last week that she was a semifinalist in the junior-senior category of the tennis tournament. . . . It was the stroke, you know. . . . Poor Michael . . . he's taking it hard . . . they were so in love . . . just like newlyweds. He says he's going to take her back to Cleveland. . . . His family has a large plot in a Shaker Heights cemetery where a lot of old families are buried. Well, that's life . . . here today . . . gone tomorrow . . . it's the Lord's will, He knows best. . . . But it makes one wonder . . . why are we here . . . what is it all about . . . does anyone know . . . and who will be next . . . etc. . . . etc. . . . etc. . . ."

Poor Ann, the girls were thinking (they had, of course, known of the stroke, known she was seriously ill in the hospital), younger than any of us and so full of life, so much in love. Boy oh boy, it doesn't pay to worry. Take one day at a time. Thank God for good health; for fairly good health.

Then, as Bad News dirged eagerly onward ("Are you girls following your doctors' orders . . . taking your medicine . . . exercising . . . watching your weight . . . seems to me a couple of us are . . . well . . . we can't be too careful . . . etc. . . .

etc . . . . etc . . . . ”), a simultaneous thought hit the girls. Expressed succinctly the thought was: every cloud has a silver lining. Dear Michael will need lots of comfort and compassion.

Before that day there had been two other widowers in Elysium to go with the nine widows. Four of the widows in Elysium were in the old-old category, far over the hill, the poor dears, not seeking new mates but awaiting the inevitable, the Last Summoner. And one of the widowers was also an old-old, barely ambulatory, waiting for space to open up in one of the area's nursing homes.

The other widower in Elysium was a sixty-nine-year-old spry, perky, witty, dirty old man, the D.O.M. appellation bestowed not only because of his prurient proclivities—consisting mainly of sly suggestions about his availability to assist the girls in “satisfying whatever primitive urges—ho-ho-ho—” the girls might be feeling—but also as a label to describe his lamentable carelessness in matters of lavation, the chap having falling into somewhat . . . ah . . . scruffy habits since the death of his wife a year ago.

Nevertheless, things were so desperate among the girls, men in such acute nonsupply, that two of the girls—no names— independently of one another had almost decided to write an anonymous letter to the unscoured chap, Harold by name (a real charmer; clean, neat, handsome when his wife was alive), and imply that if he would begin to pay just a little bit more attention to his appearance, as he used to, well, his naughty remarks of recent moment might “find receptive response from one of the girls who sits at the little circular table on the east side of the rumpus room, next to the pottery wheels, during Happy Hour.”

Hardly what one would expect from grandmothers, a letter to a sixty-nine-year-old man implying availability for sin. And the two who were on the verge of indicating at least a willingness to discuss the matter were, like the other girls, faithful churchgoers, good God-fearing grandmothers.

But loneliness is a terrible thing.

**I**t was Happy Hour, four o'clock of a scorching midsummer afternoon, two weeks after our dear little wrinkled quidnunc had brought the baleful word about Ann Watson to the girls.

It had been a busy two weeks for the girls: new hairdos, new clothes, new scents, new quivers, new hopes, old yearnings. Sympathy cards had been sent. And on Michael's return to Florida from

Cleveland, he had been swamped with elaborately-prepared food dishes. Chicken Tetrizzini (Helen), Crabmeat Casserole (Betty), Chili Con Carne (Susie), Chocolate Chiffon Pie (Polly), and a two-pronged effort by Marge: Key Lime Pie and a Spiced Poundcake. Poor Michael, true blue to the core, ate everything, and spent several sleepless nights due to a snarling digestive tract.

He had promised each girl that he would be down for Happy Hour in a few days. Today was the day. As the other retirees in the room giggled and gawked, our five girls—coiffed, corseted, soignée—fidgeted and squirmed, tried not to look at one another, every one of them feeling she was making a damn fool of herself but determined to see it through, the hell with the snickering onlookers.

Four o'clock came and went. So did four-oh-five. And four ten. The tension mounted.

"What do you think happened?" one of them blurted out unintentionally.

"Don't get excited, Polly," snapped another, "you'll have your chance. And if you don't mind my saying so, I think you went a little overboard on that stuff you're wearing. What is it, 'Mature Magic'?"

"Well, look who's talking," shot back Polly. "That cheap five and dime junk you poured on yourself smells like . . . well . . . you'd better not go outside, the mosquitoes will eat you up."

Discord had reared its ugly head, but before sharper words could be flung, Susie, who had deliberately left her glasses back at her condo—she was certain she looked better without them—burst forth, "My God . . . look . . . it's . . . it can't be . . . but . . . it's Ginger Rogers and . . . Cary Grant . . . my God . . ."

Of course it wasn't.

"It is like hell, you nitwit," hissed Marge. "It's that . . . that . . . damn her . . . damn her."

It was the Femme Fatale as she was known around the retirement village, Dody Schopenhhammer. Tanned, sleek, sexy, wearing a firehouse red pantsuit, red shoes, flaunting a décolletage that brought a loud whistle from an appreciative source in a far corner of the room, Dody looked absolutely stunning. She was hanging onto Michael's arm, gazing up at him with an intimate, adoring smile. Poor Michael—tall, dark-haired, handsome, wearing tan slacks, a white sports shirt—looked like a man on the way to the guillotine and anxious to get there.



They reached the girls' table. Michael, alternately pale, pink, red, stammered an explanation.

"Ah . . . Dody . . . ah . . . she . . . ha . . . ha . . . I mean . . . she happened along . . . And she . . . ha . . . offered to . . . accompany me in . . . ha . . . ha . . ."

"How kind of you, Dody," said one of the girls sweetly, behind clenched teeth.

"Yes, wasn't it," answered Dody, flashing a dazzling smile. "Now, Michael, be a good boy and get us a couple of chairs so that we can join the . . . girls."

**T**he secret meeting was held that evening in Marge's condo, she having goaded the girls into giving up their favorite TV programs in order to do something about the Femme Fatale.

The crux of the matter was that Dody had already stolen two widowers from under the very noses of the girls, the widowers having been residents of Elysium whereas Dody was a resident of Olympia, a good forty yards from Elysium. Each marriage had been short, one lasting four months, the other five months.

"Poor little me," Dody was heard to lament after the second death. "I must be jinxed."

H'mmmmm, snorted our girls on hearing this.

Now here she was again, pouncing upon another prize from the girls' building; ignoring the unspoken geographical rights that common decency granted to each building's widows for at least the first two or three weeks. The woman was a disgrace to her sex. Here she was, with poor Ann still warm in her grave, pawing and clutching at the bereaved, at dear, sweet, innocent Michael, a jewel, a perfect gentleman, a sixty-three-year-old retired professor of botany from a small Midwestern college. Dody had to be stopped, right now.

Marge called the meeting to order and announced that Helen, who had been a court reporter in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, for twenty years, had volunteered to keep the minutes. \*

"The chair is open to suggestions," said Marge. "Suggestions as to how to prevent Dody from making Michael husband number seven . . . the greedy creature. . . Who's first?"

Susie was first. She proposed angelfood cake liberally augmented with arsenic.

"We could mail it via parcel post with a neat little card saying, 'From an admirer.'"

The girls weren't quite that bloodthirsty, just yet. But the cake idea appealed to them, and when Betty suggested they substitute a generous amount—"make that a more than generous amount," she said—of milk of magnesia, the vote was unanimous, Helen jotting it down in her notebook, to wit: MAG. PP. AD.

One of them thought it would be a splendid idea to harass Dody, deprive her of her beauty sleep by phoning her in the wee hours and hanging up when she answered. They all liked that. And Helen jotted it down as PH. WE. HG-UP.

A rat trap in Dody's mailbox drew little enthusiasm, the main reason being that the idea was unworkable, since all the mailboxes were locked. A fairly sensible suggestion was made by Helen: why not see if they could have Dody tossed out of the village on the basis of Section 5, Paragraph 3, of the organization's constitution, which stated that "a disruptive member, on the vote of a majority of the members, may be asked to leave the village, her residence to be then sold to the highest bidder."

That sounded great, but Polly, who had been a legal secretary in La Crosse, Wisconsin, was quick to throw cold water on that suggestion, citing Dody's rights under common law, the Bill of Rights, and the indisputable fact that not one disruptive resident had as yet been asked to leave and that included "the loud-mouthed, drunken couple in 3D in our building." That was right. Dody was indeed a disruptive influence in the competition for loose widowers, but she was within her rights in the pursuit of the widowers.

"Whose side are you on, anyway?" demanded one of the girls.

"I'm on the side of law and order," shot back Polly, ignoring the fact that she had enthusiastically endorsed the milk of magnesia in the angelfood cake and the harassing of Dody via the telephone. Helen covered the matter with DISR. INF. NOPE.

Then Susie, who had been a crackerjack Yellow Pages salesperson back in Philadelphia, came up with a humdinger of an idea.

Let's hire a private investigator, she said, to investigate Dody's background. Someone like Dody just has to have some . . . well . . . sordid . . . dirty . . . stuff hidden away.

"Hey, that's great, great," interrupted Marge. "Come to think of it . . . wasn't it kinda funny the way her last two husbands kicked the . . . died? . . . Maybe . . . who knows . . . maybe she poisoned them. . . . I wouldn't put it past her."

That's right, that's right, the others agreed, all agog now. And what about those other four marriages up north before she came

here (Dody had actually bragged of her many marriages). Maybe she was a bigamist.

"Or a trigamist," said Betty excitedly.

"Where's your phone book, Marge?" Susie asked.

There were a lot of ads for private investigators. The girls, aware that TV private eyes charged from one hundred to two hundred dollars a day, finally settled on Mike Mason: "Retired New York City detective; twenty-five years on the force; discreet investigations; reasonable fees; discounts to senior citizens." It was agreed that Marge should contact Mason, find out what it would cost if they could afford it—"Try to get a flat rate, Marge," they told her. "Maybe around . . . well, maybe around five dollars an hour." Of course they were joking, maybe. But if Mason, if they could afford him, discovered that Dody was a murderess, or a trigamist, at least a bigamist, she could then be confronted: "We have the evidence, you, you murdering trigamist. You're a vile, rotten, nasty creature, and you have an hour and a half to leave town . . . or else . . ."

One week later Mike Mason reported to the girls at a prearranged luncheon at the Surfside Restaurant, a quaint little New England style establishment four miles inland from the ocean. Mason had agreed to take the case for a flat three hundred dollars.

"He said the case intrigues him," Marge explained to the girls. "But if you ask me, it's Dody who is the intriguee."

"What's he look like, Marge?"

"Oh, he's sixty years old, about medium height . . . a little chunky . . . has red hair . . . ah . . . blue eyes . . . a kind of . . . a kind of crooked smile. . . . Just . . . an ordinary type person. . . . He retired three years ago . . . planned to loaf and fish but when his wife died last year . . . he said he had to do something to keep from going crazy so he opened his one-man agency . . ."

"So . . ." one of the girls said, "he's a widower . . . right?"

Yeah, sure, that was correct. Well, that perked the other girls up, and when Marge, after Mason called her to say he had completed his investigation and could he meet them at the Surfside, when she suggested that it might be best that she go alone—"After all, five of us and one man . . . well, it'd look pretty conspicuous"—the other four girls vetoed that proposal right then. They weren't going to let Marge monopolize a sixty-year-old widower with red hair, blue eyes, and a crooked smile. Especially since each of them had

a sixty dollar investment in Mason, their share of the three hundred dollar fee. Marge, on being voted down, took it with ill-concealed umbrage, muttering something about beginning to become extremely disappointed in all of them.

During the week that Mason had been conducting his investigation, the girls did their utmost to keep Michael occupied, out of the spider's clutches. They took turns. Helen phoned him to ask if he would come down to her condo and help her fix a leaky kitchen faucet. Poor Michael explained that he was not much of a leaky faucet fixer, but Helen coyly persisted and Michael spent an hour and a half with her proving that he was telling the truth.

Marge and two other girls inveigled him into making a fourth for bridge in the Thursday evening bridge tournament. He played, but it was obvious that his heart wasn't in it. He was ill at ease, his brown eyes sad and wistful, his mind far off (the dear boy, the girls thought, still grieving for his lost sweetheart). Their table won the booby prize that evening.

And one afternoon Betty phoned Michael to ask if he could drive her to town. Her car was in the garage and it seemed that all the other girls had things to do and she had a darn dentist's appointment. Poor Michael . . . it turned out that Betty's appointment was for the following day and since, by the time she realized that, they were at the mall in town and it was noon . . . well . . . they had lunch, Betty talked a blue streak, Michael smiled melancholically, did his gentlemanly best to pretend he was having a great time.

Dody, no dumbbell, soon realized what was afoot, and when there was a lull in the girls' battle plan, she pounced. Twice that week she managed to shanghai Michael into joining her at the swimming pool, both times at sunset when she appeared at her best, the shimmering rays of the setting sun bathing her in gold and orange, her little wispy orange bikini seeming to disappear in the gloaming's hues.

The girls, alerted by a phone call from Bad News Nelly, came running downstairs each time, peeped out from behind glass doors at the bitter scene. There was Dody—a brazen nymph—she was amazing, the girls thought bitterly. She was both lissome and voluptuous, an incredible, heretofore unknown, combination. There she was, arm in arm with a lean, tawny, tanned Michael, he in white trunks. They were gazing westward, at the setting sun. Poor Michael, he seemed to be trying to unhitch himself from Dody. To no avail. It was pure hell for the poor girls.

It was even worse the second time. Again Bad News was on the ball. Again the girls came running downstairs. Again they peeped from behind the glass doors that looked out onto the pool deck. This time Dody was in the water and playfully splashing water at Michael, who stood on the deck looking unhappy. Suddenly Dody turned toward the glass doors, saw the peeping Toms, yelled at Michael, pointed. The poor girls, caught red-handed, tried to scramble out of sight. In doing so they knocked over two potted palms, someone tramped on Polly's bare toe—she screamed—and poor Susie, once more without her glasses, bumped into Marge and both of them fell to the floor, an ignominious occurrence that brought peals of laughter from an hilarious Dody—you could hear her through the doors.

Michael, they don't come any better, deliberately turned his head away once he saw the girls. And he kept it turned though Dody kept yelling at him to hurry up and look before he missed it.

Except for those two horrible experiences at the pool, the girls had managed to keep Michael free of the witch of Olympia. Now, at the Surfside, the sandwiches, salads, drinks delivered to an out-of-the-way table, the girls eagerly awaited Mike Mason's report. Murder . . . bigamy . . . trigamy . . . and hope of hopes . . . a combination of all three—loomed.

The four who hadn't seen him before were quite surprised to see that Mason was in reality a pretty damn handsome Irishman, quite different from the picture that Marge had presented. Neatly dressed in blue slacks, a white sports shirt, he looked a lot younger than his sixty years. Hmmm, thought the girls, you can't trust anyone, can you?

Mason had done a fine job. He had all the information. Said he got a lucky break right off the bat by locating former husband number four, divorced four years ago.

"He's a retired suburban Chicago auto dealer," explained Mason in a virile, masculine voice that sent tingles over the girls. "And he's living in Palm Beach . . . quite excited when I explained that I was doing a little checking on his ex-wife. . . . Why, he wanted to know. . . . I said that she was thinking of taking out some more life insurance. . . . That didn't seem to fool him for a minute, but it didn't stop him from giving me the subject's life history from the time she was born in Wisconsin, fifty-six years ago . . . ah . . ."

Two poorly suppressed gasps caused Mason to pause. He smiled, a darling, crooked smile.

"That seems to surprise some of you," he said. "And no wonder. From what Marge here told me . . ."

Oh, "Marge here," the girls all thought. They turned to stare at her. She blushed.

"Go on . . . Mike," Marge stammered, and then turned even redder. . . . "Go on, Mike," mimicked Polly behind her hand at Betty. "What do ya think of that?"

Mason quickly resumed . . . and he had some interesting revelations. But first about the deaths of the subject's last two husbands, the two she had married since coming to live at Tranquility Haven, four years ago.

"Both deaths were legitimate," went on Mason. "I checked with the coroner's office. Both men had previous histories of heart trouble. And as for the other marriages up north, everything was on the up and up. . . . A divorce each time . . . all legal, so my loquacious informant in Palm Beach said. The chap seems lonesome, eager to talk. . . ."

So far the news was bad.

"Well, what did he have to say about Dody . . . ah, personally . . . what kind of . . . ah, person she was . . . is?" interrupted Marge. "Why did he divorce her?"

Mason smiled his crooked smile. Several bosoms heaved and all hearts beat faster.

"Just a minute," said Mason, "let me get out my little book." He took a small black notebook from his shirt pocket.

"Let's see, now . . . here we are . . . allow me to quote from husband number four relative to one Dorothy Margaret Schopenhamer—her maiden name, by the way. Quote . . . 'A vain, lazy, promiscuous spendthrift, without one single redeeming virtue . . . a self-centered hussy, a witch . . . a . . .'" here Mason shut the little notebook, put it back in his shirt pocket, and said, "I prefer not to repeat the rest of the language. Suffice it to say that hubby number four had very little good to say about his former wife. Oh, I almost forgot—he also dwelt at great length on the fact that his former beloved caused constant trouble over the fact that she is allergic to about half the food chain, especially—wait a minute—" He took out the notebook again. "Yep. She can't eat anything that has the slightest hint of chocolate in it; anything with nuts, any kind of nuts; anything that comes from the sea—except a few species of fish—no lobster, no shellfish at all; no cabbage . . . a whole list of things that, according to our friend in Palm Beach, caused her to break out into hives, blotches, welts . . . in fact, it was the subject's

insistence on eliminating about everything from their meals, whether at home or when dining out, everything that her husband liked, that had . . . well . . . not a lot to do with the eventual breakup but it played a part. . . .”

Mason paused, looked mysterious, grinned; the girls waited, anticipating, hoping for, some real, damaging evidence (“We have the evidence, right here you . . . you . . .”).

“The last . . . ah . . . little tidbit provided by our informant,” said Mason, “is . . . well, . . . here it is . . . the subject, Miss Schopenhhammer, was given a settlement of exactly one hundred thousand dollars plus two thousand a month alimony and . . .”

He paused, several deep groans having ensued. He grinned . . . went on . . . “She was also given an all-expense-paid trip to Brazil, the amount involved there being in the neighborhood of forty-five thousand dollars . . .”

More gasps, bitter gasps.

“What the hell did she . . . I mean . . .” demanded one of the girls “. . . what . . . how could she spend forty-five thousand dollars in Brazil?”

Simply no trouble at all. Dody had had a complete overhaul, a complete refurbishment, top to bottom. Reconstruction (nose), augmentation (breasts), alteration (chin), rehabilitation (face lift), and, finally, the living end, a lipectomy.

Dead silence ensued after Mason finished reading the list of Dody’s cosmetic operations. Finally someone asked, weakly:

“What the . . . what is . . . what’s that . . . that lipectomy . . . thing . . . huh?”

Betty knew. She had read about it.

“It’s . . . a . . . way . . . a procedure . . . where the, well . . . it’s like a vacuum cleaner. It suctions out fat . . . mainly from the . . . buttocks . . .”

My God, someone gasped, my God. To what ends will some people go? What must poor God think, mankind tinkering with . . . tinkering with, hell . . . discarding the Lord’s divinely created model for . . . for . . . well . . . it’s beyond words . . . Lipectomy . . . *my God* . . . what next?

It was a subdued bunch of girls who got into Marge’s car for the drive back to the retirement village. Mike Mason had paid for the lunches, insisting that he’d been lucky this time, only a few phone calls, a little other work. Mason also asked if he could drive any of the girls back to the retirement village. Two of them were stopped



in their tracks by the look of Marge's face and said thanks but we'll go back with Marge.

On the way back, a mile or so from the village, a white convertible going in the opposite direction passed them.

"My God," yelled Susie. "Did you see that . . . wasn't that . . ."

"No it wasn't Ginger Rogers or Cary Grant," shouted Betty furiously. "You know damn well who it was. Why the hell don't you wear your glasses, you're gonna fall in a canal one of these days. . . . Damn . . . did you see that . . . that woman . . . she had her arm around Michael's shoulders, didn't she? That . . . that woman is . . . just . . ."

"Rotten to the core," someone else snarled.

"I still say," Susie whined, "that there was a scene just like that in *Golddiggers of 1933*, where Ginger Rogers . . ."

"SHUT UP," the four girls yelled, all together.

**A**s a result of the secret meeting held that very evening in Marge's condo, the following battle plan was agreed upon, per Helen's notes:

PH.WEE; HG UP translated: each girl to take turns phoning Dody in the wee hours on succeeding nights and then hanging up when she answered, the idea being to disturb her beauty sleep, Susie having remembered a friend of hers back in Philadelphia who had a facelift and three years later, in the midst of a heated bridge game, the woman's face began to slip and sag and by the time she was set seventh no trump, vulnerable and doubled, she was . . . "Well, it was just unbelievable. You had to see it to realize what a . . . an incredible . . . ah . . . well . . . you remember that movie, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde . . . John Barrymore played . . . Okay, you don't believe me . . . it happened . . . her face fell. . . . I saw it . . ."

KAK;CHOL-BLOT-BET: Betty—all agreed that she was the best cook—to bake a white chocolate cake, blotching, welting, and wealing in view. A suggestion to go all the way and throw in some ground-up walnuts and a tablespoon or two of grated lobster was vetoed three to two, the majority wisely claiming that the idea was to incapacitate Dody for a week or two, not put her in the hospital, just yet.

POL; PP; KAK: Straws drawn and Polly losing, she was to package the cake "in a neat, romantic way," take it to the main post office in town, send it via parcel post, no return address, a printed card inside: "From an Admirer."

LET; SU; THE WORKS: Susie, whose hobby was writing romance novels which didn't sell, was given the honor of writing an anonymous letter to Dody saying that unless she ceased right now in moving in on Michael the writer would be forced to inform Michael of "her fraudulent bottom, her false front, her spurious face, her substitute nose." A vote was then taken to determine if it wouldn't also be a good idea to add that the writer was aware of Dody's blotching and wealing tendencies, but this idea was voted down four to one for no good reason, "just on general principles" as Marge expressed it. One of the girls aroused Susie's ire by telling her to be sure to leave Ginger Rogers out of her letter. Susie's reply to this will have to be deleted here.

About here in the proceedings, tempers beginning to fray, Betty, Polly, and Susie lodged indignant protests to the chair. They claimed that they had been handed the dirty work while all Marge and Helen were to do was to harass Dody via a phone call. The issue was settled by Marge and Helen's agreeing to do all the phoning, Marge to call at one in the morning, Helen at two, and keep it up, night after night.

Sleep came late that night to all of them. They were law-abiding grandmothers, they had never engaged in anything like this. What would their grandchildren think of G-Ma? And what would little Abdul and Minny think? And would the whole damn plan do any good at all? How could any one of them compete with . . . with the Femme Fatale? Whatever the Femme Fatale wanted, she got . . . right?

Four days later an extraordinary thing happened. Michael phoned each girl, and in a hesitant, shaky voice he said that since they had been so kind to him during his bereavement, showing such compassion, bringing him the . . . the . . . ah . . . the delicious dishes . . . ah . . . he felt that they would . . . be, ah . . . interested in . . .

"Well, what I'm attempting to say," he finally said, "is that I am about to take an extremely important step . . . and . . . I would like to have you girls to be the first ones to know . . ."

Could they come to his condo at five o'clock the following afternoon? He had hoped to have them come earlier but "well, there's another . . . ah . . . another . . . individual involved and . . . she . . . said that five o'clock would be better for her . . . ha . . . ha . . ." (Ha, ha, hell, four of the girls went when they hung up. The fifth just moaned.)

Happy Hour the next afternoon was gloomier than ever. They gathered to discuss Michael's incredible request, the implications thereof, before going to his third floor condo in Elysium. They were bitter. They had lost. It was the Femme Fatale 3, the girls 0. In four short years at Tranquility Haven, Dody had snared three widowers—counting Michael as hooked—a ratio approaching one per year.

What really hurt was Michael—upstanding, honorable, true-blue Michael—about to announce that he and Dody—maybe they're just going to live together, not get married, someone said, to which the others said "shut up"—what really hurt, cut to the quick, was Michael's turning out to be . . . well . . . it was sickening . . . just sickening.

But Betty said, wait a minute, wait a minute, maybe we're all wrong.

"Maybe he's going to say that . . . well . . . how could he possibly have anything to do with Dody after he got Susie's letter . . . he couldn't . . . why the woman is . . . a Trojan horse . . . a . . . hollow mockery. . . ."

To which one of them remarked, bitterly, "Would that I . . . any of us . . . could be so hollow."

About then the girls, one after the other, took sharp note of Polly's face. Under the unusually thick layer of makeup it seemed to be full of bumps and welts.

"What . . . what's wrong with your face, Polly?" Marge finally asked.

Poor Polly, crime does not pay. She hung her head and whispered that she had just been unable to resist sampling a piece of Betty's white chocolate cake before carefully boxing it to mail.

"You what . . ." exclaimed Betty, thunderstruck. "You . . . you mean that . . . you took a piece of the cake . . ."

"Yeah, sure, that's what I said, didn't I?" snapped Polly, raising her head quickly and defying them to say anything more about it. "After all, it's not as if I stole your . . . your . . . crown jewels."

"Well, I'll be damned, I'll be damned," Betty muttered under her breath.

At five o'clock on the dot, the girls trooped into Michael's condo. Heads high, faces stern, and hearts pounding in spite of themselves, the girls seated themselves on the two couches Michael indicated.

"It's so kind of all of you . . . to come," Michael told them, his voice cracking more than a little. "I . . . you've all been so kind to me that . . . well . . . I wish the other individual would hurry

up . . . this is rather . . . ah . . . embarrassing for me . . . and maybe for you girls, too . . . ”

“Oh no,” interrupted Marge, nasty-like. “We wouldn’t have missed it for the world, would we, girls?”

Not for the world, the others said, not for the world. Poor Michael, he grinned a silly, stupid grin, looked at his wristwatch, offered the girls a drink, which they all refused, and began pacing the room.

Dody sailed in at ten after five, not a minute too soon, Michael on the verge of collapse. She never looked better. Three of the girls actually moaned.

“Instead of her face falling,” whispered one of them bitterly to the girl next to her, “it looks like our great plan fell, flat on its face.”

It did look that way. The great plan had all been in vain. In fact it was the girls themselves who had lost ground—ground they could ill-afford to lose. They had lost sleep, acquired new twinges, at least two of them had been complaining of headaches, and all of them were worried to death that the evil doings against Dody would somehow become known to the police and they would all be arrested and thrown in jail. (“Five grandmothers arrested in plot against younger and better-looking competitor,” the headlines would shout. What would the grandchildren say? And what of Abdul and Minny?) All in all, it had been a nerve-racking time.

The girls, sick at heart, stared in dismal fascination at Dody’s callipygian posterior as she wriggled across the room to where an ashen-faced Michael held a chair for her.

“Look at that,” moaned Betty under her breath. “Sure as hell doesn’t look like the warranty is about to expire.” Poor girls, how could they compete with forty-five thousand dollars’ worth of hollow mockery? Why, at least two of them were having a tough time making ends meet since their husbands died.

**I**t was Happy Hour, four o’clock in the afternoon of a gorgeous mid-December afternoon at Tranquility Haven down in Florida, and gloom hung heavy. The air conditioning was turned off, the windows were open in the rumpus room. It was warm and sunny without. Birds sang, a breeze wove among the palm fronds, early arriving snowbirds—wingless—visiting relatives at Tranquility Haven, waxed rapturous over the incredible weather, the exciting goings-on, everything. Boy, they said enviously, you kids

really have the world by the tail. Retired, never having to work again, and living in paradise. Boy, how lucky can you get?

How lucky indeed, for, misery loving company, Helen, Betty, Polly, Susie, four widows in their middle to late sixties (another one, that made two, was now insisting that the last birthday had been the sixtieth; the dear girl, we know better), were seated at their customary table glumly sipping their drinks, half-heartedly berating the snowbirds and, at the same time, thinking back.

Things had certainly changed since last summer, the girls were thinking. There was that two-timing, doublecrossing Marge living in town in Mike Mason's condo, having a great time. And the latest word from Bad News Nelly was that Marge had just sold her condo for five thousand more than she and her late husband had paid for it. Boy, there just isn't any justice.

And by now Dody and her husband—the Palm Beach one, ex number four—ought to be in Singapore on their round-the-world trip on the *Queen Elizabeth II*. It had been a particularly cruel blow to the four girls—Marge had flown the coop by then—when Number Four appeared at Tranquility Haven and swept Dody off her feet, the information relayed to the girls by Bad News.

It seemed that hubby number four was lonely and also he hadn't seen Dody since her rebuilding job after the divorce, four years ago. Naturally, as told by Bad News, "being a man—they're all alike, they all fall for trash—" he could hardly wait to get Dody back to the altar. To think, the girls moaned to one another, we brought them together again. And she's going around the world and what are we doing? Getting older, that's what.

"I wonder how Michael's getting along in the seminary?" one of them said.

"Okay, I suppose," another one answered wistfully, softly. "He'll . . . he'll make a . . . good priest . . . he's . . . he's . . ." Yes, the others thought, he's exactly the kind of man who will make a splendid priest. He was always so . . . so . . . so . . . sweet . . . and kind . . . and different.

Dody had handled the situation pretty damn well.

"Well," she told the girls the next day, after Michael's surprising announcement, "you win some, you lose some. In this case it took a pretty big person to steal Michael from me."

The girls were shocked at this blasphemy, and Marge warned her that "God'll get you for that, Dody, mark my words."

At which Dody smiled her dazzling smile and then wriggled

away, the girls staring in sagging, slumping, acute, hopeless despair.

Michael's announcement had stunned all of them, Dody included although she pretended she had known all about it, the little liar.

"I've been accepted at a seminary in Pennsylvania," Michael had told them. He had been calm finally, perhaps a little proud, and certainly happy. "The same seminary I attended for three years back in . . . well, back in the long ago when I was a lot younger and a lot more uncertain about my life's calling. Now, with dear Ann gone . . . I . . . I have been given a wonderful opportunity to resume my studies for the priesthood. I wanted to let all of you know . . . because . . . all of you have been so very kind to me . . . since . . . since . . ."

By then the girls were all crying, even Dody. They all hugged and kissed him. It was a touching scene.

How time flies, the girls were thinking. That day in Michael's condo was . . . it was . . . *my God* . . . four months ago. It's terrible how the years go by after you're alone when they should—and it seems they do—creep by. It's a funny world, a sad, miserable world.

It was now about four thirty of this Happy Hour, an appropriate moment, considering the gloomy atmosphere, for Bad News Nelly to hasten, as best she could, front and center.

"Oh, oh, look out," exclaimed Betty, sighting the Slough of Despond rapidly approaching. "Here we go again. . . . Coffee has gone to eight dollars a pound by the looks of Nelly."

But what was up was Dody Schopenhhammer.

"Nothing really exciting," said Bad News quickly. "But it might interest you girls. You remember her, don't you?"

Did they remember Dody Schopenhhammer . . . what about her. They gave Bad News their undivided attention.

"Well, I've learned that Dody's younger sister . . . divorced, of course . . . she's living in Dody's former condo . . . going to stay here for the winter, I've heard."

H'mmm, that was interesting . . . but the girls could tell by the sly expression on the little imp's wrinkled face that there was more to come.

They were right.

"Also, I've learned from . . . a source which shall be nameless," resumed Bad News, enjoying herself immensely, "that a certain widower from your building . . . all spiffed up, they say . . . a real doll . . . he looks like he used to when his wife was still living . . . well . . ."

"Well, what, Nelly?" demanded one of them. "Go on . . . what?"

"Well, I've been told that he's been seen sneaking into Dody's condo four or five times in recent days. Looks like Dody's sister's taking up where Dody left off, doesn't it?"

Well, that shook up the girls (Nelly quivered all over her skinny, frail body—it was good to know she still had a place in life, wasn't finished yet). Two of them were particularly disturbed. In fact, they were outraged, but they couldn't let Nelly or the other two girls see it. For each of them had swallowed her pride and written—ten days ago for one, only last week for the other—a carefree, anonymous note to Harold, the careless widower, asking him if he would like to drop by "the circular table on the east side of the rumpus room next to the pottery wheels" during an upcoming Happy Hour. They could talk . . . have a few laughs . . . get reacquainted. Why not try it, Harold?

Neither made the slightest hint of Harold's . . . slight fault. One of the girls had decided it was nothing but an eccentricity, and the other was certain that once the romance was on firm ground, the problem could be worked out ("Should I draw your bath, honey, or will you be taking a shower? I have your clean clothes all laid out on our . . . on the bed . . .").

It was too late in the game for finickiness. Harold was the only loose widower available, the only one in Elysium who wasn't about to keel over permanently in the middle of Happy Hour. And since Marge had snared Mike Mason—the girls swore they'd never forgive her—and Dody had outwitted them, the girls, all of our four, were absolutely desperate.

The secret meeting was held in Betty's condo that very evening. Helen kept notes; HEL-SUS-PH-WEE-HG-UP (Helen and Susie to take turns phoning Dody's sister in the wee hours and then hanging up. Each to phone at least twice a night—don't let her sleep a wink).

KAK; MAG.BET (Betty to bake an angelfood cake with plenty of milk of magnesia mixed in).

P-PP-KAK (Polly to box the cake attractively and mail it via parcel post, "from an admirer").

How about hiring a private investigator, someone suggested. Who knows what evil lurks in Dody's sister's background. Well . . . let's wait . . . see how these other things work out first. Okay.

Later, back in her lonely condo, each one thought, this time I'm really going to do my part. No chickening out like the last time. We just can't be doormats any longer. How dare that interloper,



that foreigner, that rank outsider, sneak down here and attempt to usurp our widower? How dare she? This time it'll be different. I'm going through with my part.

For last time not one of the girls had fulfilled her assigned duties. They just couldn't do it. And they were all so ashamed of themselves that they had kept their dereliction a secret. Neither Marge nor Helen had phoned Dody to disrupt her beauty sleep and hasten the day when her face would start to fall.

Oh, Susie, the writer, had written a stinging indictment of Dody—"You're nothing but a Trojan horse, a hollow mockery of decent femininity, and unless you immediately cease and desist in your despicable efforts to seduce kind, decent, innocent Michael I, an anonymous source, shall tell him all"—but she had torn it to pieces.

And Betty had baked the cake. An ordinary angelfood cake with not a speck of white chocolate in it. What puzzled her was Polly's breaking out after she sampled it. They all knew that Polly loved chocolate, was always eating it. Besides, there wasn't any chocolate in the cake.

And Polly didn't mail the cake. She boxed it, took great pains, but first sliced off a neat little piece and ate it. It was just too tempting. Then she threw the box into a greenish looking canal where a huge alligator swooped up from the bottom and swallowed the box in one gulp. Poor Polly, she almost had a heart attack.

The thing that also puzzled Polly was her breaking out into ugly bumps and welts and hives the next day. She had been eating chocolate all her life. Loved it. Now she was going to have to give it up. Boy oh boy, when you get old you keep giving up one thing after another.

# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



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The Invention of Hopscotch: Stage One? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the July Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

# Witch's Broom

by Joseph Hansen



“**D**id you ever win anything, Hack?” George Stubbs, stocky, ruddy-faced, white-stubbled, spoke from behind a newspaper at the table in the big pine-plank kitchen. “Here’s a fella won fifty thousand dollars from the supermarket down in Morro Bay. Can you beat that?”

“I can’t beat that.” The windows stood open, letting in cool air that smelled of sage and eucalyptus. Beyond the windows and the long roofed walkway that fronted the house, the sky was blue over the tawny, brush- and rock-strewn slopes of the canyon. “I never won anything, no.”

Breakfast was done with. Bo-

hannon drank strong coffee, smoked a cigarette, and tended to the morning mail, frowning at bills, pleased by checks. A lean man of forty, he owned this place—boarding stables. He loved horses. It was a good life except that people wouldn't forget he'd been a deputy sheriff. They kept coming to him in trouble. He'd never worked out how to turn them down, so he held a private investigator's license—but never much liked those times. He rose now, picked up plates, carried them across the wide planks to the sink. Out the window he saw horses browsing the meadows up behind the white and green stable buildings. Foals bucked on knobby-kneed legs, tossed their heads, chased their mammies. "Who was this lucky fellow? Anyone we know?"

"Name of Powell, Timothy." Stubbs claimed his eyesight was failing. After a long life as a rodeo rider, when he'd broken a lot of bones, he walked crippled up. Wet weather gave him rheumatics. But he didn't wear glasses and he found Powell's address in the paper without trouble. "Same mail route as us. I think I know him. Yup, his picture's here. He's rode our horses. That's right. Mother drops him off and picks him up. Way she watches him, he's her jewel."

"How did this contest work?" Bohannon laid a rubber stopper over the drain, cranked the hot water tap, squirted detergent into the rush of water. Suds foamed up, and steam clouded the window. "Does it say?"

"You had to shop every day in May, and keep your sales slips," Stubbs said. "They had a drawing, and the customer that got a total closest to the number they drew won the big prize. There was littler prizes—automobile, cruise of the Caribbean, video recorder, all kinds of stuff."

Bohannon mopped the plates with a plastic handled brush with plastic bristles and set them in a rubber-coated wire dishrack beside the sink. "You didn't save our slips?"

"Hell, I never even knew about it," Stubbs said. "You do the shopping. Up to you to tell me. Must of had signs up in the market about it. Didn't you read 'em?"

"What they said to me," Bohannon said, "was 'Shop someplace else, Hack. If these people can shell out money like that, they're overcharging you.'"

"Maybe young Powell thought that, too," Stubbs said. "And now look at him. He collects tomorrow. Going to be a ceremony at the market, a band, balloons. He'll be on TV."

"Don't be jealous," Bohannon

said. "You've been on TV. You've had your turn."

"That was just for living and remembering," Stubbs said. "Hell, I'd rather have fifty thousand dollars."

The inner door opened and Rivera came in, a slight young man, quiet, shy, who was studying for the priesthood and paying his way by working part-time for Bohannon. Rivera had just made the beds, dusted, cleaned the bathroom. "Hack," he said, "can you come with me up to the ridge this morning? It won't take long. And I promised Monsignor McNulty."

"You ever win anything, Rivera?" Stubbs asked him.

"I never gamble, George," Rivera said. "My father was a gambler. Cards. It never helped him. It never helped any of us—except to keep us poor."

"Here's a young fellow, Powell, up the road someplace, won himself fifty thousand dollars from the supermarket in Morro Bay. What do you think of that?"

"I hope he gives some of it to the church," Rivera said. He went to Bohannon, filled a saucepan, sluiced hot water over the sudsy dishes in the rack. "Hack, will you come?"

"What's the matter?" Bohannon dried his hands. "Somebody drink the sacramental wine?" From a cupboard he

took a tin tackle box, carried it to the table, opened it, laid the bills and checks inside. "The way to approach this would have been to ask me first—then promise the monsignor."

Rivera watched him put the box back. "I thought you were only anticlerical on Sundays."

Bohannon laughed and lifted a worn Levi jacket off the back of his chair at the table. "I'll come—it's okay." He shrugged into the jacket, picked up cigarettes and matches from the table, took his hat from a brass hook by the door, opened the door. "Come on. Let's go see what it's all about."

**M**onsignor. McNulty said, "We'd never have noticed if it hadn't been for the witch's broom." A tall, rawboned old man in a clerical collar, the bones of his face stood out, the skin over them taut and red-veined. Wind ruffled his thick white hair. "We have to get it out of the oaks once a year and spray them afterwards or it will kill them."

He pointed to a metal ladder that leaned in one of the big trees which sheltered the graveyard. Well up the ladder, a pudgy, balding, bespectacled youth in T-shirt and jeans, red-faced, sweaty, plucked small sprouts of stiff, pale green fun-

gus from among the shiny oak leaves. He dropped the witch's broom into a yellow plastic bucket hung on an upright of the ladder. Sometimes. More often, he dropped the witch's broom to the ground. The monsignor peered at Bohannon with bright blue eyes from deep, hollow sockets under white brows.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

Bohannon shrugged. "Same as you. Same as Rivera." The three of them stood beside a newly-dug grave, six feet long, six feet deep, with straight sides. The earth from the grave had been carefully covered with a blue plastic sheet, the corners of the sheet anchored by chunks of dry old adobe taken from the crumbling walls of the abandoned graveyard. "It looks like a professional job." Bohannon let his gaze rove the neglected place that was rank with brush, headstones fallen, the big oaks casting ragged noontime shadows. "But I don't know why, any more than you do."

"The earth is soft here, and easy to dig," Rivera said.

"And it's a place no one ever comes." Ireland echoed in the monsignor's speech. "These are old graves, you know, and the graves of men without descendants. Eighteenth century. Not a successful mission, it lasted a scant twenty-five years and

fell to ruin. It was a century too late for restoration when the diocese chose this site for the seminary."

"The burial ground walls had fallen," Rivera said. "The rains had washed the rotted wooden coffins from the earth. The bones of the friars were scattered like chicken bones—as if these good men had never served God with their hands and hearts, as if they had never prayed. It was a crime."

"And now there's going to be another crime it looks like." Bohannon pushed the weathered Stetson back on his shaggy dark hair. "It's new," he said to the monsignor. "You've questioned your people? No one saw anything?" Bohannon nodded toward the stark yellow-brown buildings below, masked by a high, ragged hedge of eucalyptus trees. "No flashlights moving around up here in the dark?"

"Nothing like that," McNulty said.

"No bad blood among your young men?"

"Hack!" Rivera's brown eyes were soft as a deer's. They showed pain. "These are my friends. They will be priests. They have given their lives to God."

"Cain talked to God every day," Bohannon said, "face to face. He still turned out to be a murderer."

The oak trembled, the ladder rattled, a shower of witch's broom fell. Bohannon took a step, steadied the ladder, peered up against the hard blue sky into the shadows of the tree-top. "You all right?" he asked the pudgy boy.

"Uh, fine, yes, all right," the boy stammered, and went back to harvesting the parasites with almost frantic zeal. The stiff little growths pelted Bohannon's hat. He stepped away from ladder and tree. The monsignor told him:

"We have cases of small envies, hurt feelings, rivalries." His look returned to the empty grave. "The usual human frailties." He worked up a slight smile for Bohannon. "We have no saints here. But I doubt we have a murderer."

"Forgive him," Rivera said, "he lives in another world."

"A world where we do have murderers." Bohannon bent and peeled a price tag off the blue plastic cover. "You'd better post a watch up here from now on."

The monsignor's white brows rose. "Day and night?"

"Whoever dug this will come back," Bohannon said. "It hasn't served its purpose yet, has it?"

"It's a desecration of holy ground." The old man turned and began to walk away downhill. The underfoot was cloddy, rocky, loose, and he teetered on

his long, frail legs. Rivera hurried to take his arm and steady him. The monsignor's voice drifted back on the hot noon air. "I'll have it filled in this very hour, and that will be the end of it."

Bohannon trudged after the old man and the young. "If you do that, whoever dug it will know it's been discovered. He'll dig another one someplace else we may never find."

"And if I don't—" the monsignor halted at the top of concrete steps in a thick retaining wall at the foot of the cemetery, built to keep more earth from sliding, more graves from opening and scattering their skeletons "—he will go ahead with his killing." He gripped Rivera's arm with bony fingers and started down the steps, dry leaves crackling under his shoes. "And with his unhallowed burial rites."

"Make it a waiting game." Bohannon followed them down. "Keep the work going on the oaks, day and night. He'll hold off on his killing then, till the job's finished and the place is deserted again. It will give me time to find out who he is."

The monsignor shook his head. "It would be risking lives that are in my keeping. I couldn't do that."

"It is work for the sheriff," Rivera said.



The monsignor said, "They have already refused me. They came and looked. They think it's a schoolboy prank."

"Maybe somebody died a natural death," Rivera said. "In a family who could not afford a burial plot, a funeral. And still wanted them in a real cemetery, not out in some empty field, not thrown in the ocean."

"It would be the same," the monsignor said, "without the sacrament. It would also break a good many laws of man."

"It sure as hell would," Bohannon said. "You know righteous people wouldn't do that, Rivera. Especially not poor ones. They find a way. They don't expect life to be easy."

"And criminals do." Rivera helped the old man onto the path at the foot of the steps. "I have often heard you say that. If it is true, why hasn't the murder already happened?"

"Because the grave's still empty," Bohannon said.

"I would like to help you," the monsignor said, "but—"

"I understand," Bohannon said. "I'll do it myself."

**M**adrone sat on hills along whose ridges horses browsed. It was a sleepy little town of spindly old frame houses with jigsaw porches that for a good many decades of this century

had been let fall almost to ruin. Now they were all fixed up and painted candy-box colors and occupied by newcomers who had turned them into antique shops, fish restaurants, art galleries, real estate offices. Some of the houses were even lived in—those distant from the main street. Dogs slept on Main Street. The buildings, once dreary brick, had been faced with cedar planks to give them a Wild West look.

Bohannon parked his dusty pickup truck on the bias in front of the paint and hardware store where there was a roofed plank sidewalk. When he dropped down out of the pickup and slammed the door, he almost looked for Gary Cooper standing in the middle of the street with six-guns on both hips, but he didn't. He climbed hollow wooden steps, crossed the planks, and pushed into the store, where it was the '80's again, the 1980's, lots of shiny plastic packaging, very bright fluorescents, vinyl floors, Formica counter tops. He moved up and down aisles until he found what he wanted. Then he hunted up a clerk in a green jacket, a thin, sunburned fiftyish man, testing a fishing rod behind a counter, dreaming.

"You sell a lot of these?" Bohannon asked.

The man put the quivering

rod back in a rack with others like it and unlike it. "How many do you want?"

"I don't want any," Bohannon said. "I wonder who bought one from you in the last two days." He laid the folded blue plastic dropcloth on the counter, took out his wallet, showed his license. The man peered at it through thick glasses, then into Bohannon's face.

"Everybody sells these," the man said.

Bohannon showed him the price tag from the one up in the graveyard. "The one I need to know about came from here."

"They're useful for a lot of things," the man said. He poked a finger at the package. "You see here? They've got these brass eyeholes, right? You can tie them over a car to keep off the rain, the sea spray. Lots of people do that. Wrap yard trash in them—they're cheap and strong. Cover up stuff you want to store outdoors. Put them under a sleeping bag. Lash them over a boat. We sell them for dropcloths for painting, but there's no end to what you can use them for."

"I can see that," Bohannon said. "You sell one lately?"

The man gave a little laugh. "Oh, probably half a dozen."

"Ah." Bohannon pushed his wallet away. "All to one man?"

"No, no. Different folks. I

don't remember. It's not like you were asking who bought a certain color paint. I'd remember that. I'd remember them. But these things." He flapped knuckly hands in the air. "They're all alike." He peered at Bohannon again. "You're the fellow owns the stable up Rodd Canyon, aren't you? Used to be a sheriff?"

"Yes," Bohannon said, "but I don't know you."

"I'm Dudley's brother Lloyd," the man said, "up from Lompoc. Dudley's in the hospital. Little minor surgery. Hernia. Occupational disease with veteran hardware men. You think you can lift it and you're not as strong as you once were. Dudley's older than me. Ten years older. I'm just filling in for him for a few days."

"Give him my good wishes," Bohannon said.

"I'll do that. This something to do with horses," Lloyd wondered, "or something to do with lawbreaking?"

"Lawbreaking," Bohannon said, "maybe. Maybe whoever bought that dropcloth bought a mattock, a spade, a long-handled shovel. Does that jog your memory?"

Lloyd frowned, pursed his lips, shook his head. "Only one I remember is Professor Thornbury from the college. Dropcloth, couple gallons interior

paint, sheepskin roller is all."

"Do you know his address?" Bohannon said.

"Have to ask at the college," Lloyd said, and turned back to the rack of fishing rods. When Bohannon was almost out the door, the hardware man called after him, "But it's not a him—it's a her. Roberta Thornbury."

The college sat in a bowl of hills. Cattle had browsed the hills and the shallow valley only a few years ago. But Bohannon didn't resent the college. He had only squeaked out of high school himself, but he was a man who liked to read and respected knowledge and those who had it and those who had the gump-tion to try to get it. And the college looked right for the place—not in the stage-set way of Main Street in Madrone, but the designer had hinted at adobe style without going overboard, so the buildings looked both old and new in a combination that didn't draw attention to itself. The color was right, the same brown as the summer hills.

He found a slot in the faculty parking lot marked THORNBURY on its bumper stone in black stenciled letters and parked the pickup there. In an office one of whose walls was an arched window looking out on

the hills, a woman who, with her back to the early afternoon sunlight, looked young but on closer inspection was past fifty, her girl's face webbed with a fine tracery of lines, told him Roberta Thornbury was on compassionate leave—as if the professor were a soldier in war-time. The corridors that had led him to this office teemed with youngsters so loud and lively they might be thought of as enemy troops if you were an embattled teacher with a lecture room full of them—they seemed an unlikely lot to try to contain.

"Somebody in the family sick?" Bohannon asked.

"Her father," the woman said. "Dying. I don't envy her. He was never an easy man when he was well." She found a pen, wrote the Thornbury address on a memo pad, tore the slip off the pad, passed it to Bohannon. "Like a lot of scholars, indifferent to the world around him, indifferent to the living, absorbed in the past, infinitely caring—for the dead."

"What was his field?" Bohannon folded the slip of paper.

"Local history, the Indians, the Franciscan missions," she said. "Fra Junipero Serra. He wants to live to see Serra made a saint. I hope for his daughter's sake that happens soon." She sighed, smiled. "Well, she's big and strong and unflappable.

She's used to him. I suppose they'll be all right."

Bohannon put on his hat, lifted the folded slip to her, gave her a smile and a thank you, and walked out the office door into hallways as empty and silent as they'd been crowded and noisy only minutes ago.

The Mexican graveyard outside Madrone on a flat section of high ground with a view of the sea and the sea wind always blowing across it and the cry of gulls—the Mexican graveyard always looked festive. It had a low picket fence painted white as many times a year as it needed it. So did a good many individual graves, whose headstones often had niches for photographs of the one buried there. But the festive look was due mostly to the flowers. Not every grave but most of them were decorated with bouquets. The flowers were always fresh and bright because they were not real, they were plastic. Driving up a narrow lane that cut between sections of graves, Bohannon tried to remember when such flowers had first come on the market, and couldn't remember how the Mexican graveyard had looked before that time.

He spotted three men hunkered down beside a mound of

earth. A wheelbarrow stood by, shovels lay by, a mattock. None was new. But one of the blue plastic tarps lay folded in the barrow. One of the men was bony, grayhaired, stooped. Bohannon knew him by sight. He did all the gravedigging in this area. The two with him were hardly more than boys. They had their shirts off. Both were brown-skinned, one was plump, the other muscular. Bohannon left the pickup on a gravel drive and walked over to them across tough, springy, well-trimmed grass. They watched him. All three smoked, all held beer cans in rumpled brown paper sacks. Bohannon heard the surf wash the shore below. Far off, sea lions barked.

"*Buenos dias*," he said. "My name is Hack Bohannon."

The old man squinted up at him against the strong light. "I know who you are," he said in Spanish. He flicked his cigarette away across the lawn, and stood up slowly, as if all his years of digging had left him permanently in pain. "How can we be of assistance to you, sheriff?"

"I'm not a sheriff any more," Bohannon said, "but they've got a little mystery up at Santa Lucia seminary and I'm looking into it for the monsignor. Maybe you can help me."

"Our own sheriff has no time

- for this mystery?" the old man said. The youngsters got to their feet, put out their cigarettes under their workshoes, picked up tools. The plump one went at loosening the earth halfway down in the grave with the mattock, swinging it well and truly. Then he climbed out of the grave, and the muscular one jumped down and shoveled out the loosened earth. He passed the shovel up, took the spade, and chopped at the sides of the grave, straightening them. The old man watched for a minute, then turned back to Bohannon. "It seems unimportant to the sheriff?"

"It may seem important to him later," Bohannon said.

"What can I tell you, señor?"

"Did anyone hire you or your helpers to dig a grave lately—other than here, I mean?"

The old man frowned. "Up at the seminary?"

"In the deserted cemetery where the monks were buried in the old days," Bohannon nodded. "That's right."

"I did not know there was such a place," the old man said.

Bohannon nodded at the sweating boys. "You want to ask them? Maybe they got an offer on their own."

The old man shook his head. "Jose is my son, Raymondo is my sister's son. They live at my house. They would have told

me. Why not? It is a strange and interesting thing."

"Sometimes young men feel a need to be independent," Bohannon said. "At a certain age, they no longer wish to share all they know with their families." He stepped to the grave. "Did anyone pay you lately to dig a grave behind the seminary?"

They stared at him. "Seminary, señor?"

Bohannon pointed inland to the mountains, the ridge where the windows of the seminary winked sunlight through tree-tops and small roofs glowed red. "Those buildings, where young men study to be priests. Long ago, there was a mission there, and the graveyard where the friars were buried is still there. No one hired you to dig a grave in that place? At night?"

They glanced at one another, looked guardedly at the old man, turned their black eyes back to Bohannon, said in unison, "No, señor," and went back to digging.

The old man said, "Someone dug such a grave?"

"Then left it empty," Bohannon said. "The Monsignor can't understand that. Can you?"

"It is hard work to dig a grave," the old man said, "and it takes skill. Who would waste all that time, all that effort? Who would dig a grave and leave it empty?"

"Nobody," Bohannon said. "That's what's got me worried." He took a card from his wallet, a card with a horse-head decoration, and put it into the old man's earth-crustured fingers. "Telephone me if you hear anything, will you? *Gracias.*"

**A**cross the coast highway from Madrone, pine-covered hills cut off sight of the ocean. Close together as they grew, building had started among them long ago. First city people down from San Francisco, up from Los Angeles, had put up summer cabins. Then retired folk had built year-round houses along the twisty roads, in the quiet woods, half hidden away. The pines were tall, long-needed, a breed to themselves, none quite like them anywhere else on earth. Shallow-rooted, quick to grow, they were as quick to fall. Power outages were common in Settlers Cove. No one had minded much. The cool, shadowy privacy, the nearness to the shore, made up for it. But those days were past. The trees were being brought down now by axes and chainsaws. Sewers were in. The sounds of saws and hammers rang through the woods all day. Empty lots sold every day, and at very high prices. Oldtimers were worrying whether to stop on and die

here, or to sell out and try once more to find elsewhere the wilderness they were losing where they'd thought to stay forever.

Bohannon found Flurry Road and the mailbox marked THORNBURY and a brown shingled place with decks back among pines and a thick, rusted undergrowth of poison oak. He rolled the pickup up a ramp of patchy gray blacktop, halted it facing a double garage under the house—its doors up, an old, if shiny, Volvo parked on one side among tools, stacked cartons, hanging bicycles, bed-springs, and on the other side a sporty new Jeep Cherokee with fake wood paneling. That one he knew—it belonged to Dr. Belle Hesseltine. He got down out of his truck, slammed the door in the silence, making a bluejay squawk among the high pines. He walked into the garage. A plank workbench ran along one side—dusty, not used for a long while. Tools hung in rows against the wall above the bench. They'd begun to corrode. Among them were small picks and light hammers—at a guess, archaeologist's tools. In a cobwebby corner leaned rakes, shovels, brooms, axe, mattock, spade. The cobwebs were torn. He knelt. The earth on spade, mattock, and shovel wasn't damp, but it wasn't so dry it flaked off, either.

"Hack? What are you doing?"

He looked up, stood up. A stringy old woman in crisp bluejeans, gingham shirt, windbreaker jacket, stood in tennis shoes in the garage doorway, frowning at him. "It would take half an hour to explain," he said, and brushed the dirt from his hands. "You spare a half hour to listen, Belle?"

She snorted, walked to the Cherokee, tossed her kit inside. "You know better than that. I came up here to Settlers Cove to retire. Never had a busier ten years in my life. And it gets worse." She climbed into the new car, slammed the door, and looked sternly at him out the window. "You're not going to stir up trouble for Roberta Thornbury, are you?"

He looked innocent. "Do I ever stir up trouble?"

"Every time you decide to play Good Samaritan," she said. "What's it about? She's got an old man in there dying who's as mean as any man that ever gave a woman grief. She doesn't need you, too."

"I'm on an errand for Monsignor McNulty," Bohannon said. "What could be more benign than that?"

She eyed him skeptically. "It doesn't sound like you." She turned the key, the Cherokee's motor rumbled, she let go the parking brake and started roll-

ing the shiny machine out into the sunshine. She halted it. "You just go easy, now, you hear?" She glanced up at the deck above her. "She looks strong, but I've been a doctor for a long time, and I'd say any more weight on her shoulders, and she'll be down sick, too."

"Belle, it's nothing," Bohannon said. "Just a couple of questions. Only take a minute."

"You stick to that," she said, and backed down the pine-needly slope to the street. He started up the plank steps to the deck. She called out to him, "And don't get yourself hurt this time. I'm warning you. I'm booked solid, till September." And she drove off.

The woman who came to the screen door looked big enough and strong enough to hurt him if she wanted to. Or to dig that grave if that was what she wanted. She wasn't fat, but her bones were big, her shoulders square, and she stood five foot ten in flat-soled shoes. A checkered green dishtowel was tied around her gray hair. Paint smeared her forehead, and she was rubbing paint from her big hands with a rag. The smell of paint was strong. She peered at him.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Do I know you?"

He told her who he was.



"Something a little out of the way has happened up at the seminary. I thought I'd ask—"

"Monsignor McNulty was here only last week," she said. "He and my father are old friends. As scholars. My father is an atheist. They have lively arguments. Used to."

"I'm not here to see him, I'm here to see you."

"That's a surprise. I'm painting, and I have to get on with it." She pushed the screen open. "Will you come in?" She walked away through a dark living room that was lined with bookshelves. Magazines he took to be learned journals were stacked on a woolly carpet, on dusty tables, chairs, a worn sofa. He followed her into a room behind an open staircase that led up. "I've moved my files and word processor out of here. He's got to be downstairs, or he'll never try exercising." She bent to work a sheepskin roller in a pan of paint on a blue plastic drop-cloth on the floor. "And I can feed him and tend to him down here easier, too. Those stairs! Athletes aren't the only ones whose legs go first." She set the roller to the wall again. "What do you want?"

"Your father's an expert on this area, right?"

She sighed, laid the roller down in the pan, walked into the living room and pulled books

from the shelves. An armload. She brought them to him. "Local Indians, customs, language, art, the first white settlers, the Santa Barbara mission, the one at San Luis Obispo, a biography of Father Serra. Definitive once. Now younger men have dug deeper."

"What about the mission that failed?" Bohannon gave her back the books. "Up where the seminary is now. Does he know a lot about that?"

"Everything there is to know." She carried the books away and put them back. "He spent years piecing together the crumbling old records. Even went to Spain to try to find more." She came back, threw him a wan smile, bent to soak the roller again, and stood to paint another section of wall. "He hated it when they built over the ruins in 1950. He loved those old broken walls, the bell tower."

"And the cemetery where the monks were buried?" Bohannon said. "Deserted now, just the gravestones and the oaks. He ever talk about that?"

She gave a nod. "He used to spend quiet times alone up there. He loved the peacefulness, away from the world."

"You do a lot of gardening, professor?"

The question startled her. She stared at him. "I have," she began sharply, and corrected

herself, "I *had* a full time academic career, Mr. Bohannon. I've never had time for hobbies. Or housework. That stopped when my mother died—years ago. And God knows, my father would never lift a finger. Selfish?" Her laugh was bitter. "You'd have to invent a new word."

A shout came from upstairs. "Bob, you bitch. What have you done with my medieval Latin dictionary? If it isn't in my hands in two minutes, I'll piss the bed for you."

"Excuse me," Roberta Thornbury said, and hurried off.

When she came back, flushed, Bohannon asked her, "I wondered if maybe you'd planted a tree lately."

"Not I." She went at painting again, angry, splashing drops on herself. "But some students brought me a California pepper tree as a gift when I began this sabbatical. They set it in for me. You'll see it on your way out."

"A tree's an odd gift," Bohannon said.

"They want me to remember them," she said. "Go now, please."

Bohannon walked down the long living room to the sun-dazzled front door. "I hope your father gets better soon."

"He won't," she said. "He's dying. We have to face that."

The pepper tree was out there

all right, young and tenderly green, about five feet high. He hoped it would grow, but it looked as if it needed more sun. Poison oak had been chopped back here, and loose earth was scattered around. The tree had been planted lately, true, but how lately was anybody's guess.

The sleeping bag smelled of mildew when he dragged it down off the shelf of his bedroom closet. Along this stretch of coast it rained a lot, and what you did to prevent mildew was lay charcoal in drawers and closets, but there was a limit to how long a stick of charcoal would absorb damp, and he'd forgotten. He shouldered the bag, carried it along the pine-plank hallway to the kitchen, took from the refrigerator a sack of sandwiches, filled a thermos with hot coffee, pulled from a drawer a three-cell flashlight. The Winchester was already in the truck. He put on his hat, pushed out into the slant of late afternoon sunlight, and knocked heels along the porch. Stubbs was out by the white rail gate, talking to two men on horseback. Bohannon made for the truck parked by the stables, but Stubbs hailed him.

"Hack? Come here, and meet the luckiest man in town."

Bohannon put his stuff into the truck, admired the Mercedes 450-SL parked beside it, walked to shake Timothy Powell's hand. He was a slender, light-skinned black, about twenty with a good smile. Bohannon asked him, "How does it feel?"

"A little scary," Powell said. "Nobody ever paid much attention to me before. Now they all want to be my friend. It's why I'm riding out now for an hour, just to be alone."

"Not quite alone." Bohannon looked at the other man. Something was wrong with his spine. There was a twist to it that gave the effect of shortening his upper body and pushed his right shoulder up in a hunch. He was in his thirties. Bohannon had seen him before. Where? The man held out a hand in a lightweight glove. Bohannon shook it.

"Dean Kirby," the man said, and smiled. "I'm manager of the supermarket. We don't want anything to happen to Tim before the ceremony. It's my assignment to keep him safe."

"Not his mother this time?" Stubbs asked.

Powell laughed. "She treats me like I was ten years old, doesn't she? I'm lucky, but that just makes her more afraid."

"You've got steady horses there," Bohannon said. "You'll be all right. Congratulations

again. And have a nice ride."

"Thank you," Powell said. "Good night."

It didn't start out like a good night. He worked for a time up the ladder in an oak, but while the stretching didn't bother him—his work around the stables kept him fit—his feet began to hurt soon from the ladder rungs. Also, he was missing some witch's broom because of the poor light. The flashlight beam cast too many shadows. And if you weren't thorough, if you missed any of the pesky parasites, the work was pointless. After an hour he gave up, clambered down, rolled out the sleeping bag, sat on it, pulled off his boots. He lit a cigarette, drank coffee, and listened to the crickets. The view from here was of mountains sloping away below, shadow-creased under the moon. A window glowed in a canyon house far off—maybe his own, he couldn't be sure. Along a stretch of coast road moved the lonely lights of cars. Small neons colored the sky above Madrone. The pine-bristly black hills of Settlers Cove were sharp against the moonlit ocean. The coffee unsettled his gut. He rattled open the bag and ate half a sandwich. Then he took the flashlight and patrolled the old cemetery. He wanted to be sure any watcher knew some-

one was here. In crossing the acre first from side to side, then up and down, he made it a point to stop at the empty grave and shine the light into it and all around it—three, four times. He wished the light would show him something. It showed him nothing. He went back to the sleeping bag and lay down.

Crackling twigs woke him. He hadn't meant to sleep but he'd managed it anyway, hadn't he? "Who's that?" He sat up, groped with a numb hand for the flashlight, and shone it into the round, bespectacled face of the lad who'd worked in the oak this morning. If he'd been given the boy's name, he'd forgotten it. The boy blinked in the beam of the flashlight and swallowed but didn't speak. Bohannon pushed to his feet. "What's on your mind? What are you doing up here?"

The boy moistened his lips. "I—have to talk to you."

"Talk away," Bohannon said, and gestured with the flashlight. The beam glinted on the barrel of the Winchester that leaned against the trunk of the oak that sheltered this spot.

"Is that a gun?" the pudgy boy said faintly.

"It seemed like a good idea," Bohannon said. "What's your name—I don't think I know. You're a student here, right?"

"Yes. Delbert May. I think you know my father. He's a public defender for the county."

"Yes. Fred. So you're his son?" Come to think of it, there was a strong resemblance. May was known by law enforcement officers and the courts as Fat Freddie, but he was a good man and a crackerjack lawyer. "Going to be a priest. How does he take that? He's a maverick himself, a radical."

The boy smiled wanly. "He says no matter how misguided I may be, I'm still his son, and he loves me."

"What did you want to tell me?" Bohannon said.

"It's just that—well—" the pudgy boy crouched and picked up a stick and poked aimlessly at the ground with it "—Father McNulty isn't really aware—" Delbert dodged an embarrassed glance at Bohannon, and his glasses glinted in the yellow light "—of all that goes on. Among the students. Right?"

"I wondered if he was," Bohannon said.

"Sometimes terrible things happen," Delbert said.

"Not murder," Bohannon said. "You don't mean murder."

"I mean talk of it," Delbert said softly. "I heard them. Kelly Sangster and Scott Hughes. Kelly was my roommate. I'd been home for the weekend, came back Sunday night, and

they were in my room, arguing. But not shouting, talking low, so I was almost in the room before I realized they were there. And I heard Scott say, 'If you tell him, I'll kill you, Kelly. Before I let you destroy me, I'll kill you and bury you.'"

"What did it mean?" Bohannon said.

"I don't know. They hardly knew each other. Scott came bursting out of the room. He didn't see me, but I saw him, and I never saw anyone so angry. He was white with rage. His face was all twisted up with it. He ran down the hall and down the stairs like a blind man."

"Sunday night," Bohannon said. "What happened Monday?"

"Kelly brooded, stayed in the room, didn't eat, didn't go to classes. That night, I heard him moaning. I switched on the lamp. He was on his knees, praying. I said 'Sorry,' and turned off the light. Next morning, he packed and left."

"And he didn't tell you why?"

"He mumbled something about trouble at home." Delbert looked around at the dark cemetery. "Did anyone come about the grave?"

"Do you think Scott Hughes dug it for Kelly Sangster?"

"It's not realistic, is it? But when you talked about murder

this morning, I wondered. That's why I'm here now. Where are you going? You're not going to tell the monsignor!"

"I'm not," Bohannon said. "You are. Come on."

"**N**obody likes trouble," Edwin Sangster said. A sturdy man in his mid-forties, in tweed jacket and wool slacks, he laid a brown manila envelope on the monsignor's desk. Sangster's son Kelly, a thin, freckled boy with misery in his eyes, stood by him. On a leather couch against a paneled wall sat Scott Hughes, dark hair, dark brows, dark beard stubble. His eyes were angry. Edwin Sangster said, "No man should make trouble for another—but sometimes we have no choice."

It was ten past one in the morning. Bohannon leaned in the doorway of Monsignor McNulty's study. Delbert May, moon face pale, expression pathetic as a martyr's, stood across the room by a window. After he'd told McNulty what he'd told Bohannon, the monsignor had phoned the Sangster house in Atascadero. Then he'd sent Delbert to fetch a file folder from the next office, and to bring Hughes. Now everyone was here. McNulty sat behind his desk under a large wooden

crucifix—Indian carving by the look of it, rough and cruel. With a solemn look, the old man closed the file folder.

Kelly Sangster said, "I wrestled with it for a long time."

The monsignor laid a briar pipe in a big brass ashtray where it kept on smoldering and pulled from the manila envelope a sheaf of Xerox copies of newspaper items. He studied these through heavy, horn-rimmed reading glasses, white hair shining in the lamplight, the only sound in the room the shuffling of the pages. He took the glasses off and looked gravely at the dark boy on the couch. "Have you seen these?"

Hughes nodded. "Kelly showed them to me."

"And the evildoer in these terrible accounts is you? The pictures appear most certainly to be of you." The old man waited but Hughes only looked away, mouth twitching sullenly. The monsignor said, "Where did you get the academic records in your file?"

"Bought them. From a student who worked in the office at Blair College. Stuck in my own photograph."

"Then somewhere there is a real Scott Hughes?"

"He died right after he graduated. Car crash. No good my denying it. I couldn't buy his fingerprints, could I?"

"So it was you—" McNulty held up the clippings "—who five years ago attacked this young couple in the dark, raped the girl, stole the car, and left the young man a cripple for life. You are—" he peered at the papers "—Earl Evan Gerber?"

"Not any more. I was a kid then. Sixteen. Out of control, mixed up, full of emotions I couldn't deal with. I'm not like that any more, monsignor." He glared at Kelly Sangster. "It was just rotten luck he recognized me."

"Sometimes we make our luck," McNulty said. "If you'd come here honestly, as yourself, this needn't have happened."

The dark boy snorted. "Come on. The fathers would have turned me down without a second thought. Rape? Mayhem? They wouldn't have cared that I'd served my time, I'd learned, I'd changed. They'd never have believed me."

"Stranger things have happened," McNulty said. "You never know till you try."

"I lied because I thought I had to," the dark boy cried. "I wanted to become a priest—to make up for what I'd done. Scott Hughes had perfect credentials. As him, there'd be no chance I'd be turned down. I needed a break. I had to make that break for myself."

"Yes, yes." The old man gave

him a weary smile. "Well, perhaps it can be sorted out." He glanced at a big, slow-ticking oak clock above the doorway. "We'll see, won't we? In the fullness of time."

"Maybe there's hope, Scott," Kelly Sangster said.

"Not because of you," the dark boy snarled. "I should have killed you when I had the chance." He lunged off the couch, knocked Edwin Sangster aside, clutched Kelly by the throat. Bohannon stepped in, pulled him off, twisted his arms up behind his back. The boy yelped and struggled. He was stocky and strong, but Bohannon was bigger, tougher, older. He looked at the monsignor.

"Phone the sheriff," he said. "Calm down, Earl, or I'll break your arms. That's better. Deep breaths. That's it." Delbert May was staring, open-mouthed, wide-eyed. Kelly was holding his own throat, gulping, in trouble with trying to breathe. His father had his arms around him and kept asking him if he was all right. Bohannon said to Earl Evan Gerber, "How long did it take you to dig that grave all by yourself? It's a big job."

"What? What?" Gerber struggled. "Let me go. What the hell are you talking about?"

The monsignor dialed the telephone. Shakily.

Bohannon said to Gerber,

"You told Kelly you'd bury him. There's a new grave up in the old friars' cemetery."

"Not me," Gerber said. "I didn't do it. I swear."

Bohannon looked at Gerber's hands. The skin was unmarred. They were not workman's hands, so there should have been blisters. There were no blisters. Bohannon was going to have to spend the rest of the night up in that graveyard.

Bohannon got out of the truck with the grocery list in his hand. Bright plastic pennons fluttered over the shopping center parking lot where cars waited, gleaming in sunlight. A section of lot near the supermarket had been blocked off by wooden barricades. A portable platform, plywood painted green, stood not far from the market's glass doors. A steel-legged table stood on the platform, and on the stiff green cloth that covered the table was arrayed glittering new merchandise: watches, stereos, television sets, microwaves, toaster ovens. A new light motorcycle gleamed red at one end of the table, a ten-speed bike at the other. In front of the platform was parked a shiny yellow Japanese hatchback with a big blue satin bow stuck to its top. A banner fluttered on the front of the market above the



doors—SAVE-MORE'S GREAT SUMMER GIVEAWAY. Bohannon had forgotten all about it.

A young woman and two young men climbed onto the platform. The girl and one of the boys held electric guitars, and the other boy, a stubby one, held a Fender bass. They wore satin outfits stitched with glitter—blue, green, rose-red—and white cowboy hats, white cowboy boots, and little white neckerchiefs. They stood at the microphones, smiled ruthlessly, and sang country and western hits to listeners seated on steel folding chairs on the blacktop and, since the volume on their loudspeakers was turned up high, to half of Morro Bay as well, Bohannon thought.

The chairs were all full. High schoolers and collegians were there in bikinis and surfer trunks. Young women with babies and toddlers. Old folks in straw hats, women mostly. Almost all Anglos. A few Latinos. A few Asians. No blacks. Wrong. In the front row—one slender, beautifully groomed woman. Dean Kirby, the market manager, leaned over her. They seemed to be talking urgently. Bohannon looked around for Tim Powell. Nowhere. Maybe they were keeping him inside the store under wraps until his big moment. If so, his mother,

if that was who the woman was, seemed not to like it. Bohannon stepped past the barricades and went to her. The only empty chair was next to her, and he sat on it.

"That's for my son," she said. "I'm sorry."

"I thought it was," Bohannon said. "Where is he?"

"We came together," she said, "but he's strayed off someplace. Mr. Kirby can't find him. It's very upsetting. Who are you?"

Bohannon told her. Her face lit up.

"Ah, he loves to ride your horses," she said. "I'm so glad we found the place we did to live. It's only a mile up the canyon from you, you know. Opposite the seminary."

"New place," Bohannon said. "The family that built it—he was an engineer at the Diablo plant. Got transferred."

She nodded. "It's comfortable. Away from people. That's what we both wanted. I sold my duplex in L.A. to buy it. You see, it's worth a black boy's life to stay in the city. Murder is the chief cause of death among urban black men age sixteen to twenty-four—did you know that?"

"I didn't know that," Bohannon said.

"And there's drugs and there's gangs, all manner of dangers. I didn't want that for Timothy.

He was spared to me, you understand. I had four beautiful children. There was a fire. He was the only one got out alive."

"Was that why he told me he was lucky?"

"It was long ago," she said, "when he was very small."

"Well, he's been lucky again," Bohannon said, and nodded at the platform. Just then, from behind it, balloons rose in a rush straight up into the sky. The people on the chairs gasped, cheered, laughed, and shielded their eyes with their hands to watch the balloons against the sun—they were green and white. There must have been a hundred of them. Bohannon said, "Maybe he'll buy a horse of his own now."

"He could," she said. "Aren't they pretty?" And then, fretfully, "Where can he be? Where can that Timothy be?"

"He'll turn up," Bohannon said. "He wouldn't want to miss his fifty thousand dollars. Nobody would."

But he missed it. The band gave up the microphones to Dean Kirby and two assistant managers dressed in green jackets and white cotton gloves as Kirby was. They read names from cards, people struggled out of the rows of chairs and came forward to accept their prizes and carry them away. The crowd laughed and clapped.

The giveaway started with the small prizes and worked up through the bicycle, and the cruise tickets, to the motorbike. At last much of the crowd circled the yellow car and the lucky sunburned middle-aged lemon rancher who had won it. The stringy man in whipcords raised the bright keys and jingled them above his head, and grinned all around him with tobacco stained teeth. Then the car rolled away and it was time for the Grand Prize. But when Kirby announced his name, and looked eagerly around the crowd, Tim Powell did not come to the platform. Kirby blinked at Mrs. Powell, eyebrows raised. He appeared puzzled to see Bohannon in the chair beside her.

"I guess he must be crowd-shy," Kirby laughed, and the people on the folding chairs laughed with him, murmured among themselves, craned their necks to see. Kirby said, "Must have developed stage fright." He bent close to the microphone. "Come on, Tim Powell." He raised the envelope and waved it. "There's fifty thousand beautiful bucks in here, my man, and all for you. Where are you, Tim Powell?"

But in the end he had to give the check to Powell's mother. She smiled for the local television team—a frizzy-haired blonde young woman with a

microphone, and a pot-bellied man with a camera on his shoulder—but when she returned to her place, she looked worried. Bohannon said, "I'll look around for your son, if you want me to. Is Kirby right? Is he shy? Maybe he's waiting in the car."

He wasn't waiting in the car. Mrs. Powell looked bleakly at Bohannon. "No, he isn't shy. He wouldn't disappoint people, either, that nice Mr. Kirby, all those folks waiting to see him, the television." She turned to look at the departing people, the white-aproned box-boys folding up the clattering chairs, the moving cars. "Something's wrong, Mr. Bohannon. Oh, I was afraid of this. All that money." She pushed the envelope almost angrily into her shoulder bag. She looked into his eyes. "Yes, please, I'd be obliged. Find him for me if you can." The car keys were in her gloved fingers, but she made no move with them. He took them gently from her and opened the car door for her. Sun-baked air came out. "Thank you." She seated herself behind the steering wheel.

"Here's my card," Bohannon said. "Phone me if he turns up. Maybe he got a ride home. With a friend."

"We haven't made any friends up here yet." She closed the car

door, moved a switch to lower the window. "He won't enroll at the college until fall." She studied the card for a moment, tucked it into her purse, laid the purse on the seat next to her. "I hope I'm worried about nothing." She tried for a light laugh. "He always says I worry too much."

"They'll take a message at my place if I'm still out," Bohannon said. "And I'll phone you anyway, when I get there. Maybe I'll have him with me."

"I hope so." She started the car. "I'll bank this money first, then go straight home. That's where I'll be." She drove the car cautiously away among the others rolling slowly out of the shopping center.

He walked the cement verge, checking out all the businesses on the square—beauty parlor, camera shop, doughnut store, laundromat, dry cleaners, baby shop, party supplies, leather goods—he stayed there an extra minute, breathing in the rich smells—and finally the savings and loan at the corner. Lines at the tellers' windows had shortened now that the lunch hour was over. Tim Powell wasn't there. But as he turned to leave, Bohannon remembered that it was here he'd seen Kirby before. Yes, at the supermarket, sure. But in here,

just last week, when Bohannon had been waiting to make a deposit in the stable's account, he'd seen Kirby over there, at a loan officer's desk. Arguing, wiping sweat off his forehead.

Bohannon did a circuit of the supermarket aisles. It wasn't likely Powell would choose the market to hide in, but it was worth a try. Bohannon found a young clerk in a green apron crouching beside a stack of cartons, using a rubber stamp machine to price canned soups. When Bohannon asked him for Dean Kirby, the answer was that Kirby had gone home early. Did Bohannon want to speak to the assistant manager? Bohannon said, "No, thanks," and left.

He drove to the waterfront, where white wooden decks and stairs took him past restaurants and boutiques that looked out on the blue bay, the great rock towering out of it, and white boats tilting and bobbing around the rock under bright orange, yellow, blue, green sails. He sat on a stool at an outdoor counter and with a bottle of Anchor beer washed down pita bread stuffed with a shrimp concoction. Against the glare, he looked at all the boats. Powell hadn't gone sailing.

He drove back to the supermarket, loaded a shiny wire cart with every item Stubbs had listed, and a few extras of

his own, loaded the sacks into the truck, then found a pay phone. The phone often rang a long time at the stables. You could get tangled up far away when there were horses to look after. Like kids, you never knew what they'd think up. At last Rivera answered, panting. Bohannon asked, "Did Tim Powell show up to ride today? Did he want to be alone again?"

"He did not," Rivera said, "but his mother is here. She is waiting for you, Hack. She is very upset."

**R**ivera had a sense of fitness. The living room almost never got used, but this was where he had put Mrs. Powell. It too was a pine-plank room with the pitched roof showing above rafters. There was a stone fireplace, Stubbs's rodeo trophies on the mantel, the Winchester racked above them. The furniture was covered in chintz to match the ruffled window curtains. Chintz wasn't Bohannon's choice but his wife's. A kidnapping and rape had cost Lisa her sanity. She was in a hospital. It looked like she was never coming back, but Bohannon didn't change the chintz. Filled bookshelves occupied a wall. Oval braided rugs lay on floorboards Rivera kept polished. When Bohannon came

in, Mrs. Powell got quickly to her feet.

"Oh, thank God," she said shakily, "you're here." She hadn't changed from her festive clothes. She pulled a crumpled paper from her shoulder bag and thrust it at him. "Look. Look what I found pushed under my front door when I got home."

Bohannon unfolded the paper. Letters cut from advertising flyers had been pasted to it to form words. I HAVE YOUR SON. IF YOU WANT TO SEE HIM ALIVE AGAIN GET ME \$50 THOUSAND CASH. I WILL TELEPHONE INSTRUCTIONS. DO NOT TELL POLICE OR I WILL KILL HIM. BELIEVE ME.

"What shall I do?" she said.

"Go to the sheriff," Bohannon said.

"No," she said, "I can't risk Tim. He's all I've got."

"All right—then do as the man says." Bohannon looked at his watch. "Get the money from the bank, go home, and wait for him to call you."

She looked stricken. "Aren't you going to help me?"

"I'm going to try." Bohannon folded the paper, pushed it into a hip pocket. "I'll send Rivera with a gun to guard you. I have to get moving. I've only got till nightfall."

"What are you talking about?" she cried.

He was talking about that unused grave, but he didn't tell her so. He took the Winchester down from above the fireplace and hurried her outdoors. "Rivera?" he shouted. He told Mrs. Powell, "The bank will close soon. Don't be late."

"What if he telephones?" She sounded frantic.

"I'll keep calling you to find out," Bohannon said.

He drove the old pickup down the canyon breakneck. It clattered and banged. The road was narrow, its blacktop old, grey, potholed, ragged at the edges. At one sharp corner, a squealing tire caught on one of those ragged edges, and nearly pitched him down a ravine of rocks and dry brush. He wrestled with the wheel, with the shift lever, with brakes and clutch. The truck went veering across to the other side, half climbed a cliff, nearly fell over, then rolled backward. He sat there for a minute, trying to collect himself. He was racing against time he probably didn't even have. That grave meant only one thing. The kidnapper had never meant to leave Tim Powell alive. Maybe it meant the boy was already dead, was dead from the minute he was taken at the supermarket. But it was no good thinking that. If he was alive, maybe Bohannon could save him. He

had to try. He yanked the truck into gear and headed down the road again.

The young woman's hair bushed out, red as a clown's wig. She had a long, sad nose. She fiddled with the flowers in a vase on her desk. "I'm sorry," she said, "but really, loan applications are confidential, Mr.—" she peered at his card "—Bohannon. Who would trust us if they thought we discussed their financial problems with strangers?"

"It's a matter of saving a young man's life."

"Then why are you asking? Why not the sheriff?"

Bohannon pushed up out of the soft barrel chair and jogged out of the place. He yanked the truck door open, clambered up inside, slammed the door. His head ached. He rubbed the back of his neck, twisted the key in the ignition, thumbed the starter button. He'd wanted a motive. He disliked guesswork. But he could go with his instincts. He had no choice. The motor caught. He let the hand-brake go. Someone shouted his name. He stopped backing the truck and waited. A thin young black woman he'd noticed listening in the savings and loan office came running to him.

"He wanted the loan," she panted, "because his wife has

left him. She worked. That gave them enough income to make the house payments. He can't do it alone. But we can't help. A third mortgage—he'd never manage it."

"Thank you," Bohannon said. "Much obliged."

"That Miss Dempsey—" the young woman blinked angrily "—she so high and mighty."

"It takes all kinds," Bohannon said. "I like yours better."

The old man and his son and his sister's son were not in the Mexican graveyard today. People in their best clothes knelt around a flower-margined grave while the wind flapped the robes of the priest who read the service, and gulls circled overhead. Bohannon looked in a dusty side mirror, found the road empty, and swung the truck around. The place he was looking for, without quite knowing it, was called La Cantina. The name flaked off grimy white stucco on a corner. He found a parking place and walked back to it. Mariachi music met him as he pushed aside a greasy curtain inside the door. A bar stretched along one side of the room, a few tables were scattered along the other. A short hall at the end of the room led to another room where a pool table stood under a green shaded hanging lamp.

The air was thick with cigarette smoke and the smell of spilled beer. Men, young and old, leaned along the bar, straw hats pushed back on their heads. Laughter and arguments were loud above the music, which blared from a very old jukebox, most of whose internal lights had died of old age. Bohannon leaned on the bar, waiting to accustom his eyes to the dark after the glare of sunlight outside. He asked for Dos Equis and got a bottle with another label altogether, and a wet glass. He paid for it, filled the glass, drank from it, lit a cigarette. When he had finished the beer and the smoke, he went along the room and through the hallway that smelled of washroom disinfectant. Jose and Raymondo were not playing pool, but they were watching others play, a man with a big belly and a skeletal man, both in cotton plaid shirts.

Bohannon stood beside Jose, the muscular son of the old gravedigger. Jose paid him no attention. The setup of colored balls on the green table was complicated. He wanted to see what the big-bellied man would do about it. Raymondo watched with the same concentration. Bohannon said, "You dug that grave up behind the seminary, didn't you? Only you were afraid to admit it in front of your

father. You didn't want him to know you had earned money you didn't give him."

Jose grabbed Raymondo's arm and started out of the room. Bohannon stepped in front of them. "I won't tell your father. Who was it who hired you?"

"We know nothing, señor," Jose said. "We must go, now."

"Stay a minute. The one who hired you did not have you do the work to no purpose. He is going to kill a young man and put him into that grave."

Raymondo's eyes widened. "He said nothing of this."

"Be quiet," Jose told him sharply. "You are a fool."

"So you did dig the grave," Bohannon said.

Raymondo was a pasty color. He looked ready to faint. "No, no, señor. We did not. Yes, he came and asked us to do it, but we refused."

"Describe the man for me," Bohannon said.

Jose stuck out his jaw. "We can say nothing."

"Not to prevent a murder?" Bohannon said.

"He paid us fifty dollars to forget him," Raymondo said. "To say nothing of what he had asked us to do."

"What are you," Jose yelled at him, "that your mouth goes so incessantly? A woman?"

"It's all right," Bohannon said. "I won't tell anyone."



The telephone against the side of the building didn't work. Bohannon trudged back to the truck, the downing sun in his eyes. The sun glared on the dusty windshield when he got behind the steering wheel. He looked at his watch. He had driven far and wide this afternoon. Time was running out on him. Daylight was running out. He headed back toward Morro Bay, Madrone, Rodd Canyon. He pulled in at a highway filling station for gas and a swipe at the windshield, and here the telephone worked. Mrs. Powell answered shrilly.

"It's Hack Bohannon," he said. "Did the call come?"

"Yes. He said to put the money in a supermarket sack and leave it under the broken adobe wall on the west side of that burial ground behind the seminary."

"Did you talk to Tim?" Bohannon said.

"I asked to," she said, "but he refused."

Bohannon felt cold in his gut. "Did he put a time to your delivering the ransom?"

"He said to do it now," she said, "but I've been waiting for your call. That's what Manuel felt we should do. Perhaps that's right, but I'm anxious to have Tim back. I want to hold him in my arms."

"Did you recognize the caller's voice?" Bohannon said.

"I—don't think so, no." She asked sharply, "Why? Should I have? Do you know who he is, Mr. Bohannon?"

"A man who wears gloves," Bohannon said, "to hide the blisters on his hands. Let me talk to Manuel, please." Rivera took the receiver. Bohannon said, "No matter how frantic she gets, don't let her deliver that money."

"What are you saying?" Rivera said.

"That the kidnapper is the one who dug that grave," Bohannon said. "He never meant to turn Tim over. He meant to kill him from the start."

"*Madre de Dios*," Rivera breathed.

"Maybe he already has," Bohannon said. "But once he gets the money, there won't be any maybe about it."

"But why?" Rivera said.

"He has no choice," Bohannon said. "Tim knows who he is."

**I**t was a handsome, new house, set on the ridge a mile past the seminary, and with a glorious view, clear to the sea. The garage was at road level, the redwood door shut down and padlocked. Bohannon got out of the truck, feeling naked. The only gun he owned was the Winchester, and Rivera had that. Rivera had to

have it. The man could go to the Powell house for the money. Bohannon dragged a tire iron from under the seat of the truck, walked to the garage door, snapped open the padlock. He raised the door. There stood the new Mercedes 450-SL, all twenty thousand dollars' worth. The owner was still here. Good. Bohannon walked to a workbench at the rear of the garage. Under it he found what he expected—mattock, spade, long-handled shovel, new, all of them, blades clotted with dirt. And bits of witch's broom. Blood was on the handle of the shovel. Those blisters had broken, hadn't they?

A set of redwood steps with two-by-four rails went zigzag up the slope to the house. Bohannon climbed them as softly as he could, not letting the worn heels of his boots sound. Crowding pines shadowed the steps. In their cold shadows, he shivered. He clutched the tire iron tightly. Curtains were drawn across wide windows that faced the deck. He stepped quietly onto the deck and spent a minute on the view. It had cost a fortune by itself, he reckoned. Out to sea, the sun was a flattened red fireball on the horizon. He tried the knob of the carved front door. The door was locked. He moved tiptoe along a side deck, where he found

french doors that were not locked. He opened one, waited, stepped cautiously inside.

The room was large and handsome. He knew little about such things, but he judged that the thick carpet underfoot, glowing with dark reds rich as stained glass, was Oriental—the real thing. A clock of brass and glass on the mantel of a broad brick fireplace had *Cartier* on its face. Built into a side wall a forty inch television set read *Mitsubishi*. He guessed that cost a bundle. He didn't recall ever having heard the brand names on the stereo equipment—receiver, cassette deck, compact disk player. He did know the names on the bottles behind the bar—Glenlivet, Wild Turkey, Beefeater. Only the best for Dean Kirby. If he had to kill for it.

Bohannon heard a voice. It came from the rear of the house somewhere. Not clearly. He couldn't make out words. Then a door opened. And he knew the voice for Kirby's. He sounded tense and angry. "I can kill you here, if you like. And drag you down the stairs to the car. It's all the same to me. If twenty more minutes of living don't mean anything to you, I'll just pull this trigger now. Ah. That's better." Bohannon heard stumbling footsteps. He heard a human sound to go with them.

Maybe the human who made it was Tim Powell. Bohannon ducked behind the bar and crouched down there, between a small, humming refrigerator and rows of shiny glasses of all shapes and sizes on shelves under the bar. There was a hint of expensive perfume. A memory of Mrs. Dean Kirby.

He couldn't see from here, but he heard the shoes of Kirby and his prisoner stumble into the room. And pass the bar. He stood up slowly. Kirby's back was to him. A revolver in one hand, pressed into Tim Powell's back, Kirby was turning the deadbolt on the front door. Bohannon stepped soundlessly from behind the bar and flung the tire iron at the fireplace. It clanged. Kirby jerked toward the sound, and fired the gun. The beautiful clock shattered. Kirby stared at it as if his heart would break. Bohannon tackled him. Kirby fell back against the door. His head struck it hard.

He slumped down, eyes shut, shoulders against the door, one leg folded awkwardly under him. The gun slipped from his bandaged fingers. Bohannon picked it up. Tim Powell was staring at him. A wide band of adhesive tape was across his mouth. Bohannon pulled it off.

"Thank God," Powell said. "That man is crazy. Locked me in the market freezer while he passed out the prizes. Then dragged me here to wait till it's dark so he can kill me and bury me. Did you know that?"

"It took me a while to figure it out," Bohannon said. "Sorry about that. Turn around—I'll untie your hands. We'll phone the sheriff. Then we'll take you home to your mother. She wants to hold you in her arms."

"I don't know why she worries so much." Tim Powell rubbed his wrists. "I keep telling her I'm lucky."

"I guess you are, at that," Bohannon said.

# UNSOLVED

by Hubert  
Phillips ("Caliban")

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the Mid-December issue.

Here's another puzzle about those mysterious islanders, the Blues, Pinks, and Whites. The Blues (it will be recalled) invariably tell the truth; the Whites invariably lie; the Pinks, when asked more than one question, tell the truth and lie alternately. A Pink's first answer to a series of two or more questions may be either truthful or otherwise.

A Blue, a Pink, and a White named (not necessarily respectively) Mr. Blue, Mr. Pink, and Mr. White were seated at a circular table. I put to each of them these two questions, going round the table in a clockwise direction:

(1) "What is the name of your right-hand neighbor?"

(2) "What is the name of your left-hand neighbor?"

The answers I received were: From the first native addressed: (1) Mr. White; (2) Mr. Blue. From the second: (1) Mr. Pink; (2) Mr. White. From the third: (1) Mr. White; (2) Mr. Pink.

*To what races do Messrs. Blue, White, and Pink respectively belong?*

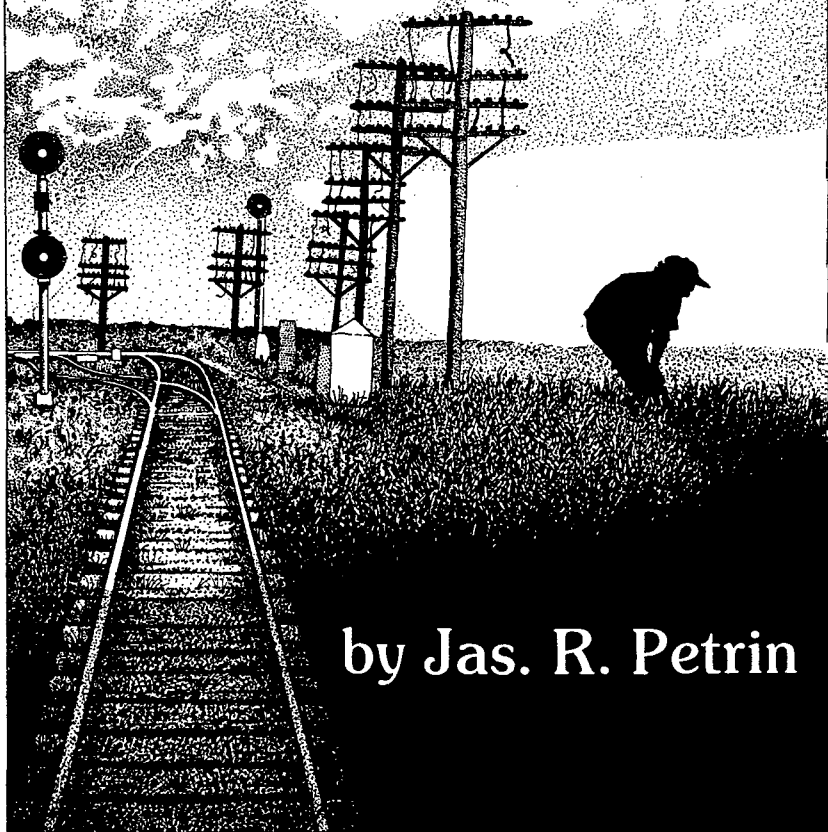
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See page 127 for the solution to the November puzzle.

*"Three Islanders."* taken from *My Best Puzzles in Logic & Reasoning* by Hubert Phillips ("Caliban"). Copyright © 1961 by Dover Publications, Inc., New York, N.Y.

FICTION

# Early Summer



by Jas. R. Petrin

**H**e weighed the ball thoughtfully in his hand, digging his fingertips hard into the stitching. A gust of wind whipped sud-

denly at his cap, blew his arm hairs warm, and rattled his trousers. He didn't like to pitch on windy days.

But the wind had brought

summer early to Maple Siding, driving steadily out of the southwest for days, lashing old newspapers along the streets and bundling trashcans hollow down dust-stormed lanes. It sucked at the roofs all night like a hot dry breath, like a thing with intentions wanting in; and Joey's grandmother said it would bring trouble.

The devil's breath, she called it: "The last time it blew like this, young Mr. Kelly, the music teacher, climbed into his bathtub, unzipped his wrists with a razor and died—oh, he was *such* a tidy man."

To Joey and his friends the unexpected summer warmth meant an early ball season, mopping up the hidden, shadowed ices, edging the damp out of the grass; a wind to blow winter cobwebs out of the players and gust them into the streets, bristling with bats and catcher's mitts, puffing them all down to Kryger's empty lot like last fall's tumbleweeds melted free of the snow.

Now Joey fought his desire to crouch and gravel his fingers in Kryger's dust, afraid to switch the ball to his glove hand. On his left, through the edge of a narrowed eye he could see Herm Brown inching out from first towards second, teasing Joey, daring him; and straight behind and out of sight, Herm's brother Terry would be five feet

out from second in a crouch; and all the time on third base, Bill the Thrill Moody waiting, hands on hips, feet splayed wide, impatient for his certain dash to home plate.

Tilston Whitley was up to bat.

Home Run Whitley had not struck out within living memory.

Joey usually tried to walk Whitley with an outside ball. But not this time. This time he was going to knuckle-ball it right into Whitley's puffed-up ribs. He'd get away with it, too. The others would be with him—even half of Whitley's own team. Everybody hated Tilston Whitley.

Joey coiled up slow, tight, mean, then snapped himself open like a spring, slinging the ball bullet-fast straight for Whitley's midsection.

Quick as a cat and grinning, Whitley stepped back and cracked the ball high and hard into left field.

A howl of screams went up. The runners ran. Joey stood in fury and despair, dazed. "Run, run!"

The runners pounded the hot spring earth into dust.

"Run!"

Then something changed. Now the cries held a note of panic. The speeding players seemed to hesitate, shift direction, then flash away in one

lunging body like a startled school of fish.

"Run!"

And they ran.

Joey watched stupidly. Bill the Thrill, who was nearly sixteen and scared of nothing, veered in his dash to home plate and pelted off after the other streaming kids at full home-run speed. Joey turned slowly to face right field. He jumped. Not twenty feet away and booming in fast came old Kryger, red as rhubarb, sweating, breathing, reaching . . . Joey dodged sideways.

Kryger had to correct his own headlong rush. One hairy hand closed on Joey's dust. Joey flew for the safety of Mason's store twenty yards off—Mason's wall, Mason's downspout, Mason's beckoning rooftop sanctuary. It was three strides, toss up the glove, catch and hold, right hand on the gaspipe, hang, swing, leap, and up. Kryger thundered in below, heaving like a steamer and fog-horning:

" . . . yard apes on my property . . . blah . . . baseball down your throats . . . blah, blah . . . whale the damn out of you . . . blah!" He shook the trough. "I know you, smart-ass boy!"

It was the usual Kryger tirade. He had two or three ranting versions of it and Joey had heard them all.

Joey clung to Mason's chin-

ney, panting up breath and the wind and the red chimney-brick dust. Kryger prowled below like a bear, grumbling and rattling the trough.

Then, from below, a cry of sudden pain.

A new explosion of curses. Hasty gravel-munching footsteps: Kryger legging it away in retreat to his wrecking yard den.

Joey kneeed and elbowed his way to the eaves and looked down. Kryger was gone, all right. He had discouraged himself on a naked seam of downspout tin. There was wet blood black on the pipe, and round ink-blot stains of it spattering away over the gravel.

Joey grabbed his glove, skinned down the pipe and aimed himself home. Then he stopped. Where was his ball? It had been here—just here—on the ground. But now he saw only the grinning toothmarks of his own sneaker treads.

Kryger had stolen his ball.

He headed for home, his stomach sour and clenching. He found a rock to kick and sent it rattling over the pavement. Jim Slater, left field, melted out of a doorway and fell in beside him.

"First game of the season and Kryger busts it up."

"Yeah, and he stole my ball, too."

"I saw him. He grabbed it up



and winged it over his fence into junk city."

"The jerk." Joey spat bitterly, neatly, and bull's-eyed a fire plug. "He couldn't bother us if we had a proper playing field like every other town around here."

"Let's get even. Let's phone the cops on him—tell them his junk yard's full of stolen cars."

"You kidding? They wouldn't listen to us. They'd hear a kid on the line and they'd hang up—they'd go back to torturing prisoners or something."

"You think they torture prisoners?"

"You think they don't?"

"It's lousy being a kid in this town."

"Sure is—they hate us."

Jim peeled off at his own street, glancing back. "Practice tomorrow? Just you and me?"

"Sure. After I do papers."

Joey rapped his stone away, just missing a wind-billowed puffball of a cat.

He thought how he'd set things right one day here in Maple Siding. He'd be mayor. He'd be the benefactor of amateur ball. He'd evict Kryger from that vacant lot, kick him heels over rump—roast out of that wrecking yard, too. There'd be room then for a ball park with a stadium that'd hold a thousand, ten thousand, fifty thousand cheering kids. He'd be the architect, the foreman,

the crane operator, the mayor all at once. Yes. He could see it. They'd raise up a statue to Joey Parker when he died, right at the ball park entrance, a statue a hundred feet high with no pigeons . . .

But first he was going to become the greatest major league pitcher the world had ever seen.

Allison Davies ran down the wide damp-wood-smelling verandah of her house on Rougemont Drive and waved to young Joey Parker plodding dreamily home on the far side of the street and kicking a stone into the wind. She willed him to hurry. She had been Joey's babysitter once and she remembered Mr. Parker as a man full of discipline.

She set off down Rougemont, heading for the bridge—and Tom Barrett. She was determined to time her arrival there so he'd wait a bit: not so long that he'd be cross with her; just long enough to coax that appreciative glow out of his eye when he spotted her. She glanced at her watch: twenty past eight. She'd walk three more blocks straight along towards downtown, cross at the library, then cut down to the bridge along the tracks.

The wind seemed as anxious as she was; it pressed her forward like a friend.

She walked happily, conscious of her youth, her attractiveness, her new white and yellow spring jacket and matching sneakers, conscious too of the way men watched her pass, strangers boldly staring, those she knew shyly happening their eyes on her. There was a heavy, early-summer scent to the air, the pollen of a thousand flowering fields brought to her like a bouquet by the wind, and it was good, very good, she decided, to be seventeen and on your way to meet a young man at the edge of town.

She passed the convenience store and Mr. Johnston huddling bored as a sack in his car, waiting for his wife to fetch supper out in a plastic bag. Two thin ladies ballooned by on the wind, hooting, clutching at their hats and their parachute dresses; but Mr. Johnston's eyes followed Allison like thieves. She moved her hips for him and walked her shadow on up the street, and the wind took her away with the dust and the candy wrappers.

She passed Sturgis Road, Elm Street, Ash Street, crossed at the library, empty with all its lonely books. Here the tracks began their long, curving swoop into the Maple Siding station. She went between the rails, staggering her pace to find every second tie.

She dodged a splash of tar

that might have spoiled her new sneakers.

It was getting darker now, but the wind was no cooler. The shadows stretched themselves out purple on the ground like paint, and the fading sky glowed yellow around the black-green tossing trees. Her thin jacket snapped in the gusts like a shroud. There was a hot-sand, train-oil smell, and a scuffed stone clinked against rusting steel.

A whole new atmosphere was enveloping her, the sound of creaking frogs and insects, the heavy swamp scent of tadpoles, water beetles, damp and decay. The wind snatched her breath from her throat and raced it away over the tall abandoned grass in hissing waves of black cattails.

"Damn."

She had misjudged her footing. Now one bright new sneaker came up spotted with mud.

"Allison, you're a fool," she told herself. "Couldn't even stick to the sidewalks like a normal person." But there was nothing to do, no turning back now, not time enough to retrace her steps. She did not want Tom to be angry with her.

She hurried forward only to halt a moment later in dismay. Ahead, a slew of oily mud and cinders stretched for fifty yards between the rails.

"Oh, damn and damn again!"

Now she would have to go back for certain, return all the way to the Rougemont crossing. She saw Tom in her mind's eye, walking away from the bridge, thinking he'd been stood up.

But . . .

Dipping away into the ditch in a quick plunge of tire tracks was a trail, the spoor of last season's bicycles. She knew it. She had cycled it herself not many years ago. It rose and fell through the scrub to the back of Kryger's wrecking yard, wound along his fence for a distance, then opened out into the vacant lot by Mason's store.

But the light was failing, the path was overgrown with scrub and likely to be muddy so early in the year . . .

The winds made up her mind for her, tilting her into the path like an encouraging hand.

There *was* mud at the bottom of the path, but only for a yard or so. She pressed her lips together and trudged on through it. Her shoes were a complete mess now; she couldn't make them any worse. "What will Tom say," she asked herself, "me twenty minutes late and plastered with mud—he'll be ashamed to be seen with me."

With a quick tiny thrill of alarm she saw how the dark was settling on her. She hurried, and the wind sighed the trees over and last year's dead leaves rattled around the path.

Far off and faint, the steady croak of the auger on the vegetable oil plant came and went, came and went, like the pleading voice of a lost ship.

The tire tracks led her, and the treetops leaped above her.

And somewhere a breaking branch cracked sharp as a snapping bone.

She stopped.

That shadow . . . there on the path . . . A chill slipped down her back like a sprinkle of snow. Surely somebody was standing there, waiting, waiting, somebody silent, somebody still . . .

"Don't be an idiot."

She forced herself on. The slope of the path rose under her and she knew she would be up and out of the scrub in another minute.

Then behind her a shout:

"Hey!"

She nearly fainted.

She trembled herself around. Terror pounced. A man *was* standing on the path watching her. Then, just as suddenly, relief flooded through her like a warm tide and she pressed her hand to her breast.

"It's only you," she laughed in a voice that was still strained tight, tight, tight. "For a moment I thought—I don't know what I thought." She laughed again. "You almost scared the life out of me."

He approached grinning foolishly. He seemed a little fright-

ened himself. There was something about his hand . . . He said, "Miss Davies—," then stopped. Perhaps the wind had carried his words away. He took her arm, lightly at first, as though to help her along; then he dug his fingers in hard with sudden vicious strength.

He began to draw her into the undergrowth.

Allison Davies was so shocked and astonished she couldn't even scream.

A mile away Joey Parker slammed up to his room. "Late!" they had pronounced; "No supper!"

He had gathered his breath to explain, but his father interrupted: "You got no business on private property. Told you and told you. The town'll get you kids a field, but you got to be patient. It's like a game. There's lots of players. You got to play ball."

Joey plumped down on his water bed, sending up a wave; and reaching into the desk drawer, he pulled out a candy bar that he had cached there himself against such emergencies. He chewed deliberately, gathering in his temper, fastening it down a bit at a time. Self-control, he told himself, was an asset to a ball player.

His room helped to settle him.

On the desk his pitching tro-

phy, won last year on the school team. Other trophies large and small littering the top of his dresser. Bats, balls, gloves spilling out of a corner. And on every side, spreading up the walls and wrapping him warmly in, a mosaic of baseball cards, cutouts, posters.

There was Mantle, the slugger himself, staring back startled over one shoulder as though the photographer had surprised him; here Babe Ruth, Sultan of Swat, chin up, looking perplexed; and Willy Mays smiling broadly from a curled-yellow sheet of newsprint. Around these legends a throng of younger players shouldered up in high gloss colors, exerting dynamic poses and fluoride smiles.

Joey tossed his wrapper aside and switched out his light. The wind shuddered his window, drawing him to the glass, and he looked out. He could see right down the main rail line, follow it with his eyes all the way to Kryger's, where a single light burned like a mortuary candle against the moving dark.

Kryger would be there in that light, counting stolen baseballs . . .

Joey didn't think any more about it.

He went out the window and down the porch roof like the shadow of a hunting owl. He ran, and the black earth flowed under him.

The wind tossed his hair. The wind roared. The wind sighed a grey cloud streak over a watchful moon and swept overhead like the current of a great river, bending trees like lilies, sweeping him along between the shimmering steel rails.

At the bicycle path he didn't even hesitate, but plunged into the greater darkness of it without missing a step, his mind leading him along the invisible turns among the dodging bushes, under the choir voices of the hydro lines and the singing trees.

Once he might have heard something above the wind, a voice or the groan of a tree; but he passed on with his mind fixed. He stumbled over some small object, something loose, and he picked it up. A sneaker. He tossed it away.

Kryger's gate stood open.

He hadn't expected that.

It stirred on its hinges, beckoning, blustered by the wind.

Joey waited, hidden, watching, sorting the night for danger with a boy's natural instinct. There was nothing. Only the constant enormous breath of the wind.

He slipped inside.

It was a bizarre place to be on a gusting, clouded night. Alien, wonderful, a confusion of tumbled iron in wild provocative shapes. Some mad midnight sculptor might have strayed

here out of a nightmare, casting a surreal trail as he wandered off into insanity. In the darkness there were few identifiable shapes.

But the ball he found easily. It lay in the open, catching the moonlight in an avenue of twisted black beams and arching hulks; perhaps a collapsed roller coaster had been dragged here with hooks. Joey tossed the ball out towards Mason's store. Now, he told himself, if the worst happened he would be able to get the ball in the morning.

And the worst *did* happen.

The gate crashed shut.

He couldn't see the gate from where he was, but there was no mistaking that galvanized hollow clank, that rattle of fumbled chain.

Instinct drove him to hide, powered his reluctant feet, clutched his hands for him, hauled him up the back of an old truck to the roof of a dead bus.

He lay there flat, waiting to be killed.

**K**ryger's heavy hands trembled, raked with a fiery pain from his scratches, and he towed the sweat from his face with the hair of his arm.

Twice he had made the long walk along the tracks to the bridge and had found nothing.

Yet the shoe was missing. That was a fact. He had seen that it was missing when he floated the body into the creek near the bridge. Quietly, quietly he had done it, not wanting to alert the lone boy, the sentinel boy who leaned on the bridge guardrail above, brooding out over the flat sighing night fields.

The body had slipped into the water easily. It was the missing shoe that was worrying him now. He had searched frantically back to the wrecking yard, searched from the gate to the old truck cab, fingered and palmed the cab's hidden places a dozen times; but he had not found it.

He had not found it.

Kryger sank down on a rusted rib of the butchered truck and knuckled his muddled knees. The wind calmed suddenly and a mosquito materialized, whining at his ear, wanting blood. He swung at it savagely. He needed to think.

What was the worst that could happen?

That the missing runner be found somewhere here on his lot.

He shook his head slowly over his knees. Why had he attacked a local girl? He had always told himself he would never do that. And so skinny, too. He could have easily driven to the city and had his pick of a thousand fatter girls, taken

her on one of his little country drives. Then he could have hidden the body here. Like the others. He could have added it to his collection.

They were all here with him, Kryger's girls.

Kay, the chubby blonde, who had sung with one plump arm trailing from the window of his truck; he had put her in the trunk of the bustle-backed Dodge. And Liz—she had wanted to be called Elizabeth, she had an eye for style; he had nestled her in the Cadillac among the tire irons. And of course his favorite, little Rosa, who tinkled silver bangles against her olive skin; she deserved a Ferrari, but he'd had to settle her in a smashed Fiat.

But there was no point in this sort of thinking.

What he must do, first thing tomorrow, was dispose of the key to the back gate. What went on at night out beyond his back fence, out in the frog and insect ruckus, was no concern of his. With no key to the lock he could say that he never came and went by that way. He could say that he hadn't seen the key in months, couldn't recall it at all.

He felt better now that he had a story, even a not-so-very-convincing one. At sunup he would scour his property inch by inch. If the shoe was here he would find it and dispose of it.

He hoped he would find it. The shoe might in some way lead to him. He looked at his scratches. He had bled. Maybe he should stay in the city until things quieted down. Maybe he should *retire* to the city. Then he could come out *here* for his girls and take them for *city* drives. Sheriff Coats's young wife now . . . Or the plump Mrs. Parker . . .

God, but that little thing had struggled. He would never have believed that a hundred pound girl could fight like that.

The wind was back, but he paid it no mind. He sat there in the night reliving his evening, sobbing into his hands with the pleasure and the terror of it.

"We don't want police," he said to the night, "not here, not here. . . ."

Joey lay trembling and flat on the rust while the stars stabbed at him through the scudding, billowing sky. He heard the snuffle of tears below and didn't understand. The world was too large for him, and he fell through space with it, spread-eagled under the timeless sky, crying to himself in his mind for his room and bed.

Eventually the rat-like sniffing faded below, and footsteps dragged themselves away.

Joey was able to creep his fear-sick body back down to the earth, worm it under the fence, pick up his ball, and sob his way

home against the angry wind.

**H**e slept late next day. He was almost late for papers.

Most of the other carriers had already picked up their ink-printed loads and left the distribution point by the drugstore. Only Myrna Greene was still there, grunting her three large bundles into a wagon. There was something different in her expression: a frightened pleasure, an anticipation, as though she were at a favorite horror movie with the best scene about to begin.

Joey's Uncle Wilson had looked like that the night he'd come home with religion.

"Murder," she gasped with satisfaction, slapping the last bundle into place.

"So?"

You couldn't give credit to Myrna Greene for knowing anything.

"Not interested, huh?" Myrna Greene picked up the handle of her wagon, smiling her nervous, pained, hopeful grin.

"There's always murders in the city," Joey said.

But Myrna Greene was rumbling her wagon away. She shouted back, "It wasn't in the city, smart-ass, it was right here in Maple Siding. —Don't you read the papers?"

She grinned away with her load.



Joey tore the cover sheet off his top bundle and sucked in his breath. The headline was three inches high: **LOCAL GIRL BRUTALLY STRANGLED!** He swallowed and sat down in wonder to read, gasping. Allison Davies—his old babysitter! He shook his head over the ink. There had never been such a thing happen in Maple Siding during his short life, in spite of Grandma's tales.

And the paper said the body had been missing one shoe.

He delivered his papers quickly, the wind wrestling him for them. He was busting now to meet Jim Slater.

Jim was tall for his age, and lanky. He had a long, loose-jointed gait that he cultivated—he had admitted as much to Joey. He said it was the way a ball player ought to walk out on the field: quiet, laid back, with a lurking arm that could lash out and strike like a snake. "We'll go to Kryger's field," he said as the two of them came together.

"You nuts?" Joey related his night's adventure. "That guy's crazy, crying in the dark. And besides, he's sure to be watching out for me after yesterday."

"Nope." Jim spoke with authority. "He's not even in town. I saw him hit the highway this morning in his pickup, going like hell-knows-what."

"Which way did he turn?"

"North."

They both grinned. Any vehicle that left Maple Siding and turned north at the junction had to be going to the city. They'd have the run of Kryger's lot the rest of the day.

"But first," said Joey, "I got to make a stop."

They found the shoe after some casting about.

They found woodticks, too. Jim was annoyed. "What do you want that thing for, anyways?"

"It's valuable," Joey said, "as evidence."

They slung pitches across Kryger's lot at one another for an hour, fighting the wind, then went for ice cream. That was another good thing about Kryger's lot. Mason's store was handy with an inexhaustible supply of soft drinks and ice cream.

"The police are holding the Barrett boy." Joey's father rattled his newspaper over his soup. He liked to read the best articles aloud over the dinner table whether anyone else had read them or not.

"His poor mother," said Mrs. Parker, passing a lettuce leaf and a bit of carrot to Grandma. They were both always dieting, and always getting heavier.

"His mother says he got home that evening after about midnight. His excuse for being so late was that he waited for the

Davies girl over two hours at the bridge." Mr. Parker glanced up. "Seems unlikely, doesn't it? When we were dating I doubt if I'd have waited two hours for you—it's just not reasonable for a person to do that." He shook the paper. "Says here the body was badly bruised . . . arms, throat, legs—she must have put up a struggle."

"Poor thing," said Mrs. Parker.

Grandma smiled over her lettuce as though it were a feast. "The wind brought her there, brought him, crashed them together. Murder," she said.

Joey jumped up from the table without excusing himself, snatched his ball and glove, and ran out into the sun and wind and baseball world.

"Look," he told Jim, "it's the same shoe. It's got to be. It's the shoe they're looking for."

"All right. It is the same shoe. So what?"

"Well, I don't know. I've got it. Maybe I should tell the police. They're looking for it."

"Help the cops? Are you nuts?" Jim slammed the ball so hard into his own glove Joey saw him wince. "What do you want to help the dumb cops for? They're part of—of *them*."

He made an insulting motion with his throwing hand that took in the adults of the whole town.

They were sitting knees up against the schoolyard fence, shirts off, chain link pressing checkerboards into their naked shoulders. The elms roared and thrashed above them like a wild green surf.

"What have any of them ever done for us?" Jim said. "Every town in fifty miles of here has a baseball field for its kids, some with bleachers, clubhouses, dugouts, everything. And we got nothing, nothing, nothing. We can't even play ball here in the schoolyard 'cause they're too cheap to buy the extra insurance. Help them?"

He spat long and slick into the grass.

It was all true, of course; but Joey still felt uneasy. "Allison Davies was my babysitter once."

"Sure. But she's dead now, isn't she? You going to bring her back?"

"It might help them nail the murderer."

"Crap! Anyone at all could have dropped that runner there. Picked it up somewhere else. Anyone. It wouldn't prove a thing. And anyways, they got Tom Barrett. You'd only complicate things. They wouldn't thank you."

"I guess you're right."

Joey pulled slowly and steadily on a long blade of crabgrass, seeking the inch of sweet white stalk. It squeaked out neatly and he slipped it into his mouth.

On the way home he loitered by the town hall and the court house. A force which he didn't understand held him there. He ought to go in, he told himself, and tell them about the shoe. He ought to tell them about Kryger's strange behavior, his crying in the junkyard night, his fear of police . . .

A car honked him out of the way. The back door let Sheriff Coats out, dragging Tom Barrett by the chain of his manacles. Tom Barrett's face didn't look murderous. It was as blank as a pie.

"Get along, you!" said Sheriff Coats.

Joey got.

**H**e kept his lamp on, reading, until his father growled his whiskers in at the door and slapped the light switch. Joey closed his eyes, letting the footsteps creak his father away; then he reached his flashlight up from under the bed, made a tent of his sheet over his head, and went back to his baseball magazine.

The voices of his parents came and went below like water, and there was the clatter of tea things.

His father's voice rose like a wave.

"Another murder last night."

"But not here . . . ?"

"The city . . ."

"... good. I mean, that's different, isn't it? You get to expect that sort of thing from city people."

"The folks at the office say there must be a connection with *our* murder. But I set them straight. 'Don't be fools,' I says, 'Tom Barrett was locked up tight as a screw the whole time right here in Maple Siding. What happened is some city cool-hander read about *our* murder in the newspapers and took the idea for himself.'"

There was resentment in Mr. Parker's voice. He might have been defending a copywriter.

"He's not locked up tight as a screw now," said Mrs. Parker; "the Barrett boy, I mean."

"I heard. The whole office was talking about it. Imagine letting a character like that out on the streets again. Insufficient evidence, they said at the hearing. Those fools aren't happy unless they got a confession signed in blood. And that damned defense counsel, Hugh Evans, arguing that the boy had no sign of a struggle on him, as if he wouldn't have cleaned himself up when he got home."

"Allison was just a slip of a thing. She couldn't have made a mark on a big strong man."

"That's right. And now Hugh Evans says the police got to find that missing shoe. 'Find that shoe,' he says, 'and you'll find

yourself a murderer.' Silly old fool. I never heard such nonsense. That shoe could turn up anywhere. Somebody could find it and toss it in our garden. Would that make us murderers? Ridiculous!"

"Somebody could just throw it over our fence."

"Sure they could. And we'd have a hell of a lot of explaining to do then, if Hugh Evans got his way. He'd make our lives miserable—damned miserable—just to protect his client."

"Maybe *we'd* wind up being his clients then . . ."

"If I had that shoe," said Mr. Parker, "I'd take and stuff it into Hugh Evans's mailbox."

Joey switched off his flashlight and came up out of his tented sheets breathing into the dark. Cars under his window wiped their headlights along the wall.

It was a great idea.

It was a dangerous idea.

He couldn't wait to tell Jim Slater.

And as he slept the night was calm with no disturbances: except that, for a time, Kryger hung upside down outside Joey's window like a bat, blinking vengeful eyes at him and working his teeth.

**“Y**ou're crazy. You know that? Crazy.”  
They paid for

their soft drinks and came out of Mason's air conditioning into a smother of hurricane heat. They let the wind kite them to shelter under a tree.

"Kryger really *would* be a killer if you tried that on him. He'd start with you. He's got something wrong with him, you know—a few shingles blown off. No telling what he might do if he got his hands on you. He doesn't have a full sack of beans, that guy."

Joey took a pull at his orange pop.

"I got that angle covered—he wouldn't get near me. It's a good idea, Jim. It could work. I think old Kryger's scared of the police already. Have you noticed that he never calls the police on us for trespassing?"

"That don't mean nothing."

"It must. He probably does have stolen cars in there."

"And what if he really is the killer? Have you thought about that?"

Joey snorted. "Kryger? That's a laugh. He's too old to chase girls. I bet he's over forty—fifty even. Nah, somebody else threw that sneaker in the scrub to get rid of it—Tom Barrett, most likely."

They were both quiet for a moment, thinking. Finally Jim said, "For all you know, it might not even be her shoe."

"It *must* be."

"Sure, but you don't *know*."

Joey thought about that. Then he said, "It doesn't make any difference if it is or isn't. Kryger won't know either, will he? I'm just banking that he doesn't want the police snooping around his place." He rolled himself out flat on the grass and watched a low cloud drag its white belly over the top of the tree.

**T**he sound prodded Kryger like a stick.

*Clank, pause . . . clank, pause . . .*

He hunched himself to peer out into the yard. Through the fly-specked glass of his office window, he saw the smart-ass boy, the one that always ran up onto Mason's roof.

The kid stood on Kryger's own vacant lot, bold as a landlord, facing into the wrecking yard, rapping his ball off Kryger's fence. Kryger's reaction was rage. He had fierce thoughts of slipping out the back gate, circling around and coming up behind the kid—but he had already thrown away the back gate key.

Well, one shout, one scowl, one shake of the fist would send the kid galloping.

He bullied himself up into a good heat and crashed out loud through the door.

"Here! Get out of it—move!"

But the kid *didn't* move.

He flinched a bit, he nearly fumbled his ball; but he didn't

break and run the way Kryger had expected. He just gathered up his arm and started in with the ball again.

*Clank . . . clank . . .*

Kryger felt something twisting and letting go deep in the workings of his gut; the same sort of feeling he'd got with the Davies girl, and with all those girls in the city.

He pounded up to the fence, swelling himself like a toad.

The kid stood firm. The ball came up—*clank*—flew back . . . came up—*clank*—flew back. Kryger rolled in like an engine, steam-valving and firebox-belching, ready to burst. He halted five feet from the kid, his nose just inches from the steel mesh.

The ball came up at his face—*clank*—flew back . . .

Kryger stood sweating, thick fingers winding, unwinding like rope in the steel links, fingers wanting to crush something. But he saw it was hopeless. The kid had him. There wasn't a thing he could do. He was penned up like a prisoner behind his own damn fence.

The kid was watching him closely, as though trying to find his moment; then he said in a thin voice, "Make you a deal."

"Deal? You want to make deals, trespassing on my land?" Kryger tried to go through the fence again.

"Deal. You let us play ball on

this lot here with no more hassles, and we won't tell anybody about the shoe."

The shoe.

The whole sky, the sun, the wind seemed to gather and pound Kryger once like a hammer. It was as though he had just walked blindly into a wall, the breath was knocked clean out of him. If he hadn't been gripping the fence with both hands he would have sat flat down with the shock.

"What shoe?" he managed to whisper.

"That one." The kid turned and pointed.

A second boy, a long slow movement in jeans, stepped around the corner of Mason's store. He held up and dangled a shoe, spindled it, swung it into the air. It turned and turned.

White and yellow . . . yellow and white . . .

"I found it in your wrecking yard. There, on top of that bus." The kid pointed again.

Kryger remembered the long, slim, flailing denim legs. He looked at the bus. Yes, it was quite possible. He ought to have thought of looking higher up instead of bloodhounding about on the ground. Still, he reminded himself, nobody could prove the shoe had anything to do with him.

"It's got blood on it," the kid said; "yours."

Kryger realized he was still hanging on to the fence, hands high up, his welted and scratched arms bare to the boy's gaze. How that little bit of a thing had fought: country spirit; none of the city girls had matched it . . .

"How do you know it's my blood?" he asked weakly, trying to seem amused. He felt like giving the whole game up, walking straight on down to the sheriff's office, picking up the keys and locking himself in the cage. He'd say, "Here I am—Ollie Kryger. It was me strangled the Davies girl—and lots more, too, in the city." He imagined the sheriff savagely beating him in the hidden dark of the cells.

The boy was talking.

"Remember when you chased me up onto Mason's roof? You cut your hand on the downspout. Well, I took that shoe just now over to the downspout and rubbed the dried blood all over it. So it's got your blood on it, no doubt about that."

Here was hope!

It flickered a long way off in the forest of his thoughts like a candle in a distant window. These boys didn't really believe he had killed the Davies girl. Tight, straining cables began to loosen inside him.

"What is it you want from me, boy?"

"All we want—all I want—is

for you to stop chasing us off this lot and breaking up our games. We don't hurt nothing of yours—you got no windows here for us to break. We don't cost you nothing. You leave us be, and we leave you be. Okay?"

Now Kryger stopped trying to heft the fence out of the ground and relaxed against it, the hard steel pressing his cheek. The world, which only a moment ago had leaped up under him, was leveling out rock solid again. These kids had nothing on him, nothing at all. They were attempting a clumsy frame.

Still, he must not force their hand. There *could* be some original stains of his blood on that shoe.

"Look, kid," he began, "—what's your name?"

"Joey."

"Look, Joey, I see what you're trying to do here. But you can't make a story like that stick. Don't you know these detectives got modern scientific equipment? They'll see right away what your game is—they'll match rust stains to the spout, or something."

"I won't tell them about the spout."

"Oh, but I will, won't I, Joey? I got to defend myself against a lie, don't I?"

The boy wavered. But he said with defiance, "We can rip the spout off right now, my buddy

and me, and run with it. We can hide it someplace—"

Kryger forced a laugh. It took muscles he didn't know he had.

"Joey, Joey, that's no good. They'd see it was missing, they'd see it was freshly torn off, wouldn't they? I'd have to tell them how you tried to blackmail me. And blackmail is a crime. They'd make you talk, Joey. They'd get you down the basement of the sheriff's office and they'd make you talk, you know they would. They can get pretty mean, those cops, Joey . . ."

The boy appeared totally deflated now. His catcher's mitt drooped at his side, his large doe-eyes were desperate.

Timing, Kryger thought, is everything. He waited three seconds, four, then said:

"Anyways, Joey, you got me all wrong. All wrong. If one of you kids had only just come and asked me outright about using the lot, I'd have let you. I would have, Joey. You kids must think I'm a pretty mean old guy, but I'm not really. A man just likes to be asked, that's all."

Kryger paused for a moment to let that take effect, then added, "Try me now, Joey. Ask me straight out if you can play ball on my lot, straight out like a man, and hear what I've got to say."

The boy glanced back at the corner of Mason's store, at his



pal, who looked bored with the whole business and wasn't dangling up the runner in a tease any more, but draping it carelessly in one hand at his side.

"All right," the boy said finally, "I'll go for it—can we play ball on your lot or not?"

Don't make it too easy, Kryger thought, don't get him suspicious. Aloud he said, "Can't you say please—it's just good manners."

The boy heaved a sigh like all the sighs of all the bothered boys on earth. He turned so that his pal would not see his lips move, and lowered his voice.

"All right—*please*."

Kryger screwed up his brow to affect deep thought. Then he said, "Why not?"

The smart-ass boy whooped and slung his glove into the air.

"But," warned Kryger, "don't you kids damage anything." It was a meaningless caution: there was nothing to damage.

The boy wheeled and fled over the gravel to his friend. He spoke excitedly, then the two shrilled with glee. The boy with the shoe flung it high in the air, and the two of them darted away.

The shoe rose swiftly, climbing against the blue early-summer air, arcing, tumbling slowly,

slowly, yellow and white, yellow and white . . .

Kryger brought the shoe back into the wrecking yard, doused it generously with kerosene and put a match to it. The gay spring colors flared briefly into summer and turned black.

The smoke rose straight up.

There wasn't a breath of wind.

It was a glorious songbird morning, and like birds after a storm the Maple Siding ladies were emerging from their nests in new spring colors, chitchatting and tittering in the street.

Kryger watched them in their full-breasted plumpness. He breathed a little faster, anticipating.

He walked his big front gate shut in the gentle air. He overheard one of the kids whisper, "He's not so bad."

His lot surged like a sea with tumbling, laughing kids. They were squalling like gulls. The smart-ass boy was there on the pitcher's mound, and he waved to Kryger and Kryger waved back.

"Play ball!" Kryger bellowed, grinning.

Smart-ass boy, he thought, play your silly game.

Kryger was retiring.

To the city.

# Murder by the Tubful

by Sara Plews



**“T**here’s a body in the bathtub.”  
I laugh. The woman in the office building across the street has finally spotted me. She waves back.

I turn to Ceil.

“What?”

“There’s a body in the bathtub.”

She’s wearing one of the hotel’s white bathrobes, her red hair tumbling like a waterfall down her back, her thin face cocked at a slight angle, her green-flecked grey eyes staring at me.

I shake my head, walk to the desk beside the bed, pick up the phone.

"Yes, it's Mr. Baartman in 421. Is it too late to order breakfast? Good. Orange juice, toast . . . white . . . bacon and eggs . . . scrambled . . . coffee . . . milk, please. For two, yes. Listen, could you also send up a newspaper? Oh, all right."

I hang up.

"They're outta papers," I say. "We'll pick one up at that magazine store down the street, okay?"

She hasn't moved. I sigh.

"In the bathroom, huh?"

I walk past the bed, down the short hall, past the closet, into the bathroom.

The shower curtain, velvet on the outside, plastic on the inside, is pulled across the bathtub. I put my hand out, touch the curtain, take a deep breath, and fling it back.

A man is sitting in the swivel chair farthest from the bed, staring at me. I am on the bed, a wet washcloth across my forehead, my right hand in Ceil's left. The tic under my left eye is jumping.

"Hello," he says.

"Hello," I say.

"My name's Wexler, hotel security."

I look at Ceil. She pats my hand.

"Tell me, Mr Baartman, what do you do?"

"What?"

"You know, what do you do for a living?"

"Oh. I'm a freelance writer."

"Unemployed, huh?"

Ceil laughs.

"My husband writes short stories for mystery magazines."

"Mystery, huh?" He looks interested.

"Yes," Ceil says.

"And what do you do?" he asks her.

"She makes money," I say.

"I write romance novels," she says.

"Uh-huh. So how come you're here?"

"Well," she says, "we're scouting background, looking for ideas. My husband, well, he's sorta . . . well, I mean . . ."

"Writer's block, huh?"

"Exactly."

He heaves himself out of the chair, stares at me, then walks past the bed toward the door.

"Uh, Mr. Wexler?" I say.

"Yes."

"Well, uh, what about the, you know, the bathtub?"

"The bathtub?"

"Uh, the body in the bathtub."

He stares at me a few seconds.

"Well, Mr. Baartman, let me put it this way. If you wanna take a bath, go ahead."

And he walks out the door.

I look at Ceil.

"Mr. Wexler isn't too happy," she says.

"He isn't too happy? What about the body in the bathtub?"

"Well," she says, "by the time Mr. Wexler got here, there, uh, was no body in the bathtub."

We stroll down the corridor to our door.

"Mmm, I loved that lobster," Ceil says.

"Yeah, so did I."

I unlock the door.

"Listen," she says, "hang up the coats, I'll order the drinks."

I open the closet door.

Mr. Wexler is sitting in the swivel chair, staring at me. I am on the bed, a wet washcloth across my forehead. Ceil is trying to remove that part of the lobster that is on the front of my shirt.

"Hello again," he says.

I say nothing.

"Well."

I sigh. "There was a body in the closet."

"So I hear."

"Hear?"

"Well, let's put it this way. There's no body in the closet now."

Ceil pats my hand.

"I see," I say.

"Do you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Listen, are you under a doctor's care or something?"

"Don't be silly," Ceil says.

"He's not having a nervous

breakdown. Just writer's block."

He stares at me.

"And besides," Ceil says, "I saw the bodies, too. Both male, both naked, both with knives sticking out of their chests."

My stomach gurgles. Ceil pats my hand again.

Mr. Wexler stands up, starts to pace.

"Let's see if I got this straight. You check in about noon, report a body in the bathtub an hour later, then report another body in the closet seven hours after that. Is that right so far?"

Ceil and I nod.

"So goddamnit where are the bodies?"

Ceil and I shrug.

"I mean, are there two naked men with knives in their chests wandering around this hotel or what?"

"Maybe it's some kind of joke," Ceil says.

He stares at her, then at me.

"A joke, right."

He shakes his head, walks to the door.

"If you find any more bodies, keep it to yourselves, huh."

"Are you asleep?"

"Yes, Ceil, I'm asleep."

"Sorry."

She moves closer to me.

"Listen, do all these bodies do anything for you?"

"What? For God's sake, Ceil..."

"No, no, I mean have you, well, are you getting any ideas?"

I close my eyes. She waits several minutes, then nudges me.

I sigh.

"No, Ceil, I'm not getting any ideas."

"Well," she says, "we've gone a whole day and no bodies."

I reach up and turn off the light beside the bed.

"Did you check the bathtub?"

"Yes, Ceil."

She laughs.

"And the closet?"

"Yes."

She laughs again.

"Well, I guess that about covers it."

She is quiet for several heartbeats.

"Did you check under the bed?"

"Jesus, Ceil."

"Did you?"

"No."

"So how are you gonna sleep tonight?"

I think about that for a while. Then I reach up and turn on the light. I push back the covers, roll to the edge of the bed, lean over, put my left hand on the night table, my right on the carpet, lower my head, and check under the bed.

A man is sitting in the swivel chair farthest from the bed, staring at me. I am on the bed,

a wet washcloth across my forehead. The tic under my left eye is doing handstands.

"Hello," he says.

I say nothing.

"My name's Crowley. I'm a policeman."

I look at Ceil.

"The back of my head hurts," I say.

"Poor boy," she says. "You hit your head on the night table when you fell out of bed."

The policeman coughs.

"Tell me, Mr. Baartman, what do you do?"

I look at Ceil, then at him.

"I'm a freelance writer."

"Unemployed, huh?"

I take a deep breath.

"I saw a body under the bed."

"This bed?"

"Yes."

He shakes his head.

"We've been moved to a different room," Ceil says. "Don't you remember?"

"I guess not."

"Well," Ceil says, "the good news is they finally believe us about the bodies."

I look at her, waiting for the bad news.

"This body stayed put," she says.

"Guy's name was Wexler," the policeman says. "Head of hotel security."

I look at Ceil. She touches the bump at the back of my head.

"Naked, knife in the chest,"

the policeman says. "Like the others, right?"

I nod carefully.

"So where were you this afternoon?"

"We were window-shopping in the mall downstairs," Ceil says.

"Were you together the whole time?"

"Yes," I say.

He gets out of the chair, walks toward the door, stops, turns to face us.

"Well," he says, "don't leave town."

And he smiles.

"Listen," Ceil says, "how come you told him we were together the whole afternoon?"

I say nothing.

"Don't you remember the half hour or so when you went off to the bookstore?"

I say nothing for about a minute.

"Listen," I say finally, "did you notice the doorman this afternoon on our way out?"

"Can't say that I did. What's the point?"

"The point," I say, "is that he looks like the body in the bathtub."

Ceil laughs.

"And I suppose," she says, "that the curly-headed cashier

behind the front desk is the body in the closet?"

"Yes," I say softly.

"By God," Ceil says excitedly. "I think you're getting an idea."

"Yes," I say. "I think I am."

There is a knock on the door.

"Yes," I say.

"Room service."

I tie my robe and open the door.

"Good morning, sir," the young waiter says.

He moves inside the room, placing the tray on the table beside the window.

"I've brought you a paper, too, sir."

He pours the coffee. I sign the bill.

The waiter moves toward the door. With one hand on the door-knob, he looks to his left, at the closed bathroom door.

"Uh, sir, there's water leaking into the carpet here."

"Oh," I say, still standing by the window. "I was running the bath when you knocked."

"Well, no problem, sir. I'll turn it off and get a maid to clean it up."

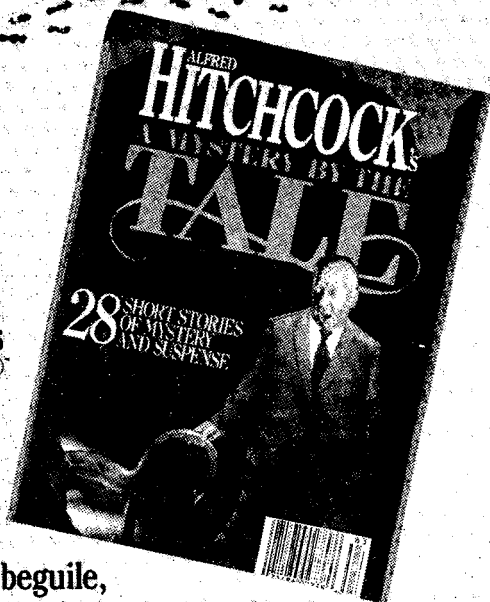
He opens the door, steps into the bathroom, then hurriedly steps out.

"Jesus," he says, "there's a body in the bathtub."

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FICTION

# The Green-Eyed Savior

by Jeffry Scott



Illustration by Steve Long

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Linda McCaig wasn't aware of striking gold, right away. After nearly two frustrating weeks with Leonard Associates she was resigned to failure—they were too smart for her. Actually, resignation's not being in Linda McCaig's nature, she took vengeance on the furniture.

Her only aim was to fix a minor problem, since the major one defied her. Rattling it and swearing under her breath, Linda managed to yank the stubborn drawer right out of the desk. Releasing a bit of paper, a memo slip, friction-furred at the edges and shiny from repeated, ill-tempered dragging to and fro between drawer and runner.

Slimly athletic, with a spectacular mass of auburn hair making her face look thinner—a shame, since already it was too sharply intelligent for beauty—she studied the message and demanded, "Who is Mr. Roy?"

Topsy Goggins pounced instantly. "Didn't they teach you that at Oxford College, then?" Ms. Goggins was a fool, but that failed to keep her mouth shut. Moreover she'd been with Leonard Associates "right from the start," announced the fact daily, and seemed to assume that the company was her property.

Poor little Mr. Pevsner, sens-

ing trouble, ventured a diversion with, "Oxford is a city and as we say a university, dear Topsy, comprising oh-so-many different colleges—but there is no Oxford College *as such* . . ."

Neither woman took notice. Smiling sweetly, Linda said, "A simple 'I don't know' would be fine, dear. Should come easily, it's your slogan."

Color high, Topsy Goggins panted, "You're always wanting—to know everything. When a Mr. Roy's needed, I'll—get hold of him, thanks very much." And she grabbed for her asthma inhaler.

"Don't be daft," Linda countered wearily. She'd been brought up to pity the afflicted but considered the older woman a bullying, ignorant pain. "There's an urgent message here, block capitals underlined, for somebody to ring Mr. Roy. Only the message-taker forgot to put down who is supposed to phone him back. When I know who Mr. Roy is, it should be possible to work out the person he wanted to contact. Or is that too deep for you?"

Hissing distress, Imre Pevsner ducked behind his untidy ramparts of ledgers. Even while speaking, Linda was reflecting that she had been with Leonard Associates for a short while and far too long; certainly long enough to bring out the

scratchy side of her personality.

As Topsy Goggins quivered and gobbled, the paper was twitched out of Linda's fingers. Len Batch had a knack of doing that, lounging up on a person's blind side so that he seemed to materialize like the Cheshire Cat, grin and all. Winking at her, he spoke genially. "Keep it down to a bellow, girls, you know I'm delicate."

Anything less delicate than Leonard Batch was hard to imagine. He was a superbly healthy, almost uncomfortably handsome young man with brown velvet eyes and a cheerily high opinion of himself. Glancing at the message he said easily, "Lot o' fuss about nothing, this is years old." Addressing Topsy, who composed herself to grin in her toadying way, he added in an aside, "From when we were in Drayton Gardens, working out of my bed-sitter, eh? You rascal, chasing me round that room all day!"

Ms. Goggins, puce with pleasure, blinked rapidly and giggled. Len Batch winked at Linda again, the eye concealed from Topsy Goggins. "Anyway, not only is this from the year dot, must have come over with our very first desk, it's Mr. Ray, not Mr. Roy at all. Sanjit Ray, used to be our Bombay agent; powerhouse intellect like yours

should have worked that out from his number, all those dig-its—worse than a knitting pattern or a football pools perm."

"I never noticed the number," she admitted sheepishly, delighting Topsy Goggins.

Len Batch rolled the paper into a pellet and flicked it away. "End of crisis, wish all our problems vanished so easily, eh?" He looked at his watch. "Well, looks as if Gary won't get back from Manchester today so we might as well close up, ladies." Catching Mr. Pevsner's reproachful, hamsterish eye, he amended, "And gent, of course," with impudent lack of apology.

Topsy Goggins never lingered, especially when encouraged by her boss. Imre Pevsner, an alcoholic, had been licking his lips miserably ever since five thirty P.M., exactly one minute earlier. As Linda McCaig gathered her belongings, Len Batch asked, "Fancy a drinkies on the way home?"

"I'd love to," she told him insincerely, "but I have a date. Can't break it because it should be the last."

Mr. Batch squared his shoulders, eyes gleaming. "Giving some poor devil his marching orders, are we? Excellent. Tomorrow night, then, supper. Got to do an inventory at that place we bought, Tillingen Square. You can help me, we'll

have a picnic, smoked salmon sandwiches and a nice bottle of shampoo, I'll take care of that, you're on." And he loped out to his Jaguar.

Smiling sardonically, Linda mused that much could be forgiven—even the caddish blasphemy of miscalling champagne—when a fellow had that much cheek. Len Batch had taken her refusal to be dated and by inspired sleight-of-speech transformed it into an assignation. Making it sound as if he was falling in with a hint she'd given, to boot. He was in some ways a magnificent specimen and she wondered whether he just talked a good fight. . . . Certainly she'd go to the house in Tillingen Square, though Richard would have kittens. . . .

Gary Dosteval, Len Batch's nominal office manager and probable partner in Leonard Associates, wasn't a man to be seduced. If he had been, Linda McCaig wouldn't have dreamed of attempting it, for he gave her the creeps. But Len Batch was human, all too much so. Cultivate him, to put it delicately, and she might break the firm's apparent policy of using only temporary secretaries and never keeping them for longer than two weeks.

Oh yes, Len Batch had a way with words.

“Putting it another way,” Linda McCaig explained to her escort, half an hour later, “Batch is an inspired liar, his Munchausen reflexes are uncanny.”

They were sitting in the farthest corner of a wine bar, beyond eavesdropping range. Detective-Inspector Richard Pyne, in leather jacket, was trying to look the rakish sort of jerk willing to buy overpriced cocktails, well watered, in a rotten imitation of a Victorian conservatory mated with a spaceship heavy on chrome. She looked at him sharply. “Why are you *creaking*, Dick?”

“Borrowed this blasted jacket off my son, should have dieted first, I’m sure the zip’s stuck and talk about a corset . . .”

“You’ll live. Lenny Batch is one of those clever fools; if he hadn’t started lying a blue streak when I found that bit of paper and asked about the mysterious Mr. Roy, I would never have started wondering. It must be important, else why spin that instant guff about Sanjit Ray?”

Torture by clothing was not sweetening the policeman’s temper. “Naturally you couldn’t have read it wrong, as Batch claimed,” he stated sarcastically.

Unruffled, she said, “The

message was written in block capitals. Some bygone temp, fresh out of secretarial classes, wrote it down to dictation on the phone, then typed it all over again, super-neatly, and the original was mislaid—it was wastepaper by then, anyway. Len Batch reacted the moment I spoke the name, so I'm sure the caller was trying to contact him. 'Double urgent,' suggesting a panic . . . my hunch is somebody was desperate to get in touch with Batch but for some reason didn't want to leave their real name."

Zip freed at last, Inspector Pyne nodded dubiously. "Or their full one—can't be more than ten thousand blokes in England with the first name Roy. Look, luv, Batch and Dosteval, who's the real brains in that little nest of vipers, are very, very cautious. Planting you there was a gamble, nobody expected you to learn much in a couple of weeks. What I'm saying, you needn't start reaching, you've done fine."

She wanted to retort, "Rubbish," but ambitious detective-constables need to be diplomatic with superior officers, even friendly ones, else they go back into uniform. Linda McCaig was not only ambitious but fairly new. She compromised on, "Confirming what you already knew isn't my idea of good progress, sir?"

"Don't call me that," Pyne reminded her. "Stay in character, luv, like method actors do."

Linda nodded contritely. "There's more to this number thing—I said Len is a clever fool, he tried to trick me into telling him whether I'd noticed it on the 'Mr. Roy' note, some nonsense about Bombay. Well, I'd noticed all right. The dialing code was for Dover, not Bombay . . . here's the full number, I wrote it down as soon as Len Batch took himself off. And for all his guff about the message being years old, the date on that slip of paper was for six months ago, April second."

Inspector Pyne copied the details, secretly impressed. "He does seem to have made a meal over discounting that message. But the number will turn out to be for the busiest pub on Dover docks, or a public call box," he forecast gloomily.

Ignoring that, she added, "Old Pevsner, the clerk . . . I think he might be some sort of struck-off doctor or maybe a chemist. I try to stick around the office at lunchtime, when the others leave, doing the *Telegraph* crossword as an excuse. Little Imre always helps me out with clues about medical terms or drugs. . . ." Linda trailed away, catching the significance of her final word.

Pyne said, "Well, if Dosteval

and Batch *are* into drugs, a tame expert on the team would be a great help. Pevsner isn't that chap's real name, we're still checking him out, the doctor-pharmacist angle might save time." Being a beer man, Pyne took his white wine like medicine. "See, you haven't wasted your time. But I'm glad you finish this week—apart from Pevsner and that woman Goggins, they never keep anyone on too long."

We'll see about that, she thought, poker-faced. Impulsively she asked, "If we don't really know what Leonard Associates is up to, why all this effort?"

Inspector Pyne tugged his ear, an unconscious signal of evasiveness. "Oh, wheels within wheels, luv," he replied vaguely, "you don't need to know."

Okay, thought Linda, then you don't need to know that I may well have Len Batch on a string. Pyne and Superintendent Mells, who was running the operation, had drummed it into Detective-Constable McCaig that her targets were wary and must be handled with extreme caution. Better to miss information than risk getting caught seeking it, they'd lectured. If Batch or Dosteval betrayed a glimmer of suspicion, she was to bail out immediately.

According to them, that would leave the pair uncertain over

whether they were being spied on, still vulnerable to a replacement. Linda McCaig feared there was more to it: that Dosteval at least wasn't just wary but dangerous. Luckily Gary Dosteval kept clear of her, while Len Batch . . . well, he was Len Batch, a crook but above all a *male* crook whom she could handle.

"Right," said Pyne, thankfully pushing his half-full glass away and standing up, "we'll meet here, same time the day after tomorrow. Just so I know you're off the premises there for good. We'll debrief in full the following morning at HQ. 'Night, dear, and mind how you go."

**N**ext day at Leonard Associates turned out to be one of mixed moods and fortunes.

Gary Dosteval, skull-faced, dapper, sent Topsy Goggins out to buy stationery, needlessly, the minute Linda arrived for work. Then called her in to his office. "Gen'rally," he began without preamble, "we stick with using temp secs, but maybe it's time we got a bit of continuity. Len reckons you're dead efficient and that. Before I decide, I need to know the form about you, Miss, um, McCaig. Like whether you'd mind staying late, if you got taken on the staff. Thing is, there's overseas

calls to be taken, timed calls, when me and Len aren't available. Would you mind holding the fort, could be twice a week, till maybe nine, ten at night, make sure the phone's answered? You could have time off to make up for it, work a four-day week . . ."

Pretending to consider, Linda said at last, "I don't think so, Mr. Dosteval. My boyfriend's a bit possessive, likes me to be around every night when he finishes work. But if it was standard hours when everybody's here, I might be interested."

Dosteval conceded, "Fair enough, just a thought. We'll let you know about the job by tomorrow. That's all."

What brought that on? Linda wondered. Obviously Gary Dosteval had tested her, offering a possible snooper the ideal chance to get the office to herself on a regular basis. Passed with flying colors, she decided smugly, returning to the main office just as Topsy Goggins flew in from the street, clutching parcels, panting and red from the exertion of running all the way and anxiety over missing something.

Slamming the packages down, she blurted, "I'll be glad to see the back of you, madam!"

Tauntingly laconic, Linda yawned, "Maybe, maybe not."

Her reward was to feel thoroughly mean and petty. Topsy Goggins, never attractive, grew uglier in a moment, almost haggard. She plumped down, head quivering with stifled emotion, and started typing in a blindly clattering fury.

But there was little time to spare for regrets. Leonard Associates might be a cover, but it was a frantically busy cover, in fits and starts. It operated a theater tickets and guided tours agency, a discount scheme offering cut-price entry to certain West End clubs and restaurants, and then there was the property side.

Leonard Associates owned half a dozen houses scattered around west London, converted into studio apartments on short lets. Over the past few days Linda McCaig had drifted into handling the problems arising—workmen locked out by tenants, tenants locked out by themselves, cleaners too slack or too officious, linen supply services forgetting deliveries or making several to the same address on the same day, wrong at that.

Ear sore from the phone, Linda was taken aback to discover that lunch hour had arrived. No sign of Len Batch, which was mildly unusual. He surfaced well after three P.M., a flesh-tinted waterproof dress-



ing on his cheek drawing attention to the vivid bruising around it. Topsy Goggins fluttered and sputtered, Mr. Batch was sulky: "Slipped in the shower, do leave off and stop flapping, Tops."

She subsided, expression stormy. "Ta very much, Lenny. I'm sure I don't know why everybody goes out of their way to be rude to me."

"Don't be so bloody silly," he growled, urbanity flawed as his face. "No calls, no nothing, I'll be in my office." But passing Linda, he grinned swiftly.

His door slammed, Topsy bridled and stamped away to the powder room. Len Batch, schoolboy-impish, reappeared the moment she left the main office. "Date still on for tonight, Lin?"

"I don't see why not."

"Great." He cleared his throat, whispering stagily in a bid to joke away real furtiveness. "Look, Gary's a right old woman and Puritan, no need for him to know we're . . . well, anything. I'll go on ahead, the house is Number Four, Tillingen Square, round the corner. Use the back door, I haven't a key for the front." He leered at her. "Who's a lucky boy then? Champers and tender loving care, just what the doctor ordered."

Hardly had he gone than Gary Dosteval bustled out from his cubicle, dressed for the street

in camel coat, muffler, prim snapbrim. "I'm going to the Shepherds Bush house, Miss McCaig, check the builders aren't robbing us more than usual. See you in the morning."

About the same time, perhaps four miles away across London, Mr. Chichester was admitting dolefully, "It's our nightmare, of course," before relapsing into silence.

Superintendent Mells and Inspector Pyne exchanged glances. Over Mr. Chichester's bowed, narrow grey head, Superintendent Mells mouthed, "*Like drawing teeth.*" Arthur Mells resembled a seal, the same liquid, sadly intelligent eyes and general sleekness; but he dressed like a banker and talked like a boys' club chaplain. A hell of a copper.

"You're saying our number rang a bell," he suggested, "no pun intended. When we checked it and found what your fellow Robb does for a living . . . 'Mr. Roy,' alias Rob Roy the legendary Scottish bandit or freedom fighter according to which side of the border you hail from, alias Francis Robb." He beamed and waited.

"I'm not sure," Mr. Chichester brooded, addressing fingers laced tightly enough to turn white. Mr. Chichester ran a lit-

tle known and less talked-of section of Her Majesty's Customs. Ask the rhetorical question about who shall guard the guardians and the answer was on Mr. Chichester's I.D. card.

"I'll put *our* cards on the table," Superintendent Mellis declared with the slightest, masterly whiff of reproach. "It starts with murder: 'in cold blood' is a silly phrase, but these have been executions in the way of business one might say, and the victims were major drug pushers. Citizens we can well spare, I won't dissent. However, start killing your business problems and it becomes routine and sooner rather than later innocents get hurt. Further, I'm old fashioned, too stupid to change, and I'm paid to uphold the law.

"Very well, or rather very bad, because our regular informers are scared silly. But there are straws in the wind-up, my little jest, and they point at a certain company's dealing in everything from rented flats to travel. Cautious bosses: nobody works there long enough to be dangerous, or those who are permanent have reasons to keep quiet about what they may only guess.

"Still and all, we've put a trace of flesh on the bones. A legitimate company, for instance, doesn't need a very ex-

pensive documents-shredder locked away in the basement. That class of hint. The phone number is our first substantive lead, though." Again he beamed and waited invitingly.

"Murder in the way of business," Mr. Chichester repeated, reaching a decision. "My God, it still shakes me and I ought to be better than most at knowing the real world."

He sniffed and went on, tonelessly, "Francis Robb is forty-six years of age and a senior customs agent at Dover. His station deals with car-ferry traffic, more often than not the Green lane, nothing to declare.

"Robb has worried me for months. Nothing palpable, you understand, no dramatic change of spending patterns. But there's a smell . . . And his wife left him; could be for any number of reasons but I happen to know the family and . . ." His unpleasant reverie gripped Mr. Chichester for a moment.

Then he resumed, "That absurd attempt to code his name when he called, um, your target, suggests panic, hey? Now, I'll guess the date of that telephone call. The second of April, am I correct—or don't you know the date it was made?"

"We know," the superintendent said.

"On the second of April," Chichester disclosed, "Francis

Robb slipped on his garden path, broke a leg. His wife, a great pal of *my* wife, says Robb acted terribly strangely, even for a man in shock and pain. Dragged himself indoors, locked the lounge door in her face, made a phone call and waited the best part of an hour to get one back. *Then* he opened the door and let his wife tend him, ring the ambulance."

Inspector Pyne guessed, "He was on his way to work when it happened, not coming home from duty."

"Precisely," Mr. Chichester agreed. "He was desperate to warn somebody, we can see now, that he would not be at his usual post in the Green Channel for incoming ferry passengers from France, the channel for those with nothing to declare."

"Perfect," Pyne said disgustingly, meaning the opposite. "The mule comes off the ferry loaded with dope, enters the Green Channel, customs officer Robb calls him over and goes through the motions of checking his baggage. With the random searches in Green, that ensures no other custom chap stops the carrier sailing through."

"Our nightmare," Chichester repeated dully. "I'm in your hands, super. I'd like to go to Dover at once, suspend him, start the internal disciplinary

procedure before passing the case to Kent police. But no doubt you'll favor something less, er, direct—such as intense surveillance to discover Robb's pattern, then follow a courier he's passed, to catch your target people taking delivery?"

"Something of that nature," Mells agreed dryly. "Excuse us a minute," and he virtually towed Inspector Pyne out to the corridor. The strip lighting there was unkind to his bland face, showing it starkly worried and old.

"Robb turns out to be crucial to Batch and Dosteval, Dick. If they think there's even a chance that WDC McCaig is onto the connection . . ."

Pyne reassured him. "She's a cool customer, young Linda; fortunately Dosteval wasn't around when she happened on that phone message. Len Batch thinks himself God's gift to womankind, he swallowed her tale about not noticing the phone number."

Mells hardly listened. "I want WDC McCaig out of there at once. Go to her place, help her pack, she can go straight back home. Impress upon her that she mustn't go near Leonard Associates again. Tomorrow she's to ring them, plead illness or a death in the family, say she won't be back."

Inspector Pyne's expression

was a shouted protest, but his tone remained civil. "Batch thinks he got away with it—Linda does a runner, he'll think again, be edgy just when we want him confident. Sir."

Superintendent Mells snapped, "This is the age of equality, Dick. Dead men tell no tales—that's how we started sniffing at Batch and his pal, remember—and exactly the same goes for women. Why are you still here, inspector?"

Not like the guv'nor to jump at shadows, Pyne grumbled mentally as he drove through Chelsea. Linda McCaig was sharing a flat there with two more secretaries, part of her cover at Leonard Associates. She had moved in just a week before starting the job.

Two girls were in when Pyne pressed the buzzer; neither was Linda McCaig. "I'm her brother, she's expecting me," he told them, and was welcomed in to wait. By seven forty-five P.M. each girl had said she couldn't understand it, Linda was such a homebody, never went out at night and punctual with it, home by seven at the latest, set your watch by her.

He nodded, forcing a smile. He could have told them that. WDC McCaig was supposed to be here if she wasn't at Leonard Associates. A carriage clock chimed eight times. The flat

was too warm if anything, but Inspector Richard Pyne was starting to feel decidedly chilly.

**T**illingen Square is built around iron-railed central gardens. Perhaps all the locals have lost their private keys to the gate, for nobody has ever been witnessed sitting or strolling there. It's not a welcoming neighborhood, though dourly respectable: the houses are too massive and shabby, they frown.

Fate enjoys corniness, so just as Superintendent Arthur Mells was observing that dead women tell no tales, Linda McCaig was hurrying into Tillingen Square. Once Len Batch and Gary Dosteval took themselves off, little Pevsner and Topsy Goggins had done their famous Ship-Deserting Rats act. Imre Pevsner was brazen about it, smacking his lips and positively scampering out, nearly suiciding under a bus, to the Duke of Buccleugh pub across the road. Ms. Goggins, slyer, simply vanished via the powder room and back door while Dosteval was still closing the front one.

So Linda had locked up and switched off the lights, finishing ten minutes later than she'd expected. Still, this must be the house, builder's scaffolding piled beside the front steps and blocking the door—just as well

that Len Batch had told her to ignore that and use the back way. She tapped along a dank alley beside the house, moving as cautiously as an old lady because the Victorian tiled surface was scummed with mud and wet leaves.

It crossed Linda's mind that Batch might have caught her with a practical joke. But rounding the corner, she saw wan radiance through a pebble-glass window, just sufficient light to discern the door beside it, ajar.

She went in, finding herself in what might have been a conservatory—large, shadowy, islanded with broken furniture and smelling of mildew. Linda was intent on setting the proper tone from the start: put Len Batch on promised land, flirt for as long as possible since he'd expect that and—

Her head exploded.

"Len couldn't make it," said Gary Dosteval, but he had hit her by then and the evil wise-crack, delivered to a victim, knocked senseless, was for his own benefit.

Linda McCaig skidded and scrabbled back to consciousness, finding herself very close to the floor, quite modest items like plant stands and a drunkenly leaning grand piano seeming to loom and tower. She was lying on a roll of carpet, nastily

clammy carpet, source of the mildew smell.

She felt terrible. Though it was minor by comparison, another problem was that her skirt seemed to have rucked to mid-thigh. Groggily, Linda tugged it down . . . except that she did nothing of the sort, nothing was happening in the movement line.

Jesus! Take stock, lie still and work out what happens . . . Impact, that had been it. A blow. She'd walked into something or lost her footing—

"Telephone book," Gary Dosteval told her. He held the thing up, covers faded, evidently part of the house's lumber and dating to bygone times when London telephone exchanges had cosy labels such as GULLiver and PERivale and TRAFalgar instead of robot figures. Linda McCaig gasped and Dosteval squatted on his heels and flourished the book. "Whack somebody with one o' these, and it's good as a cosh any day. Lovely lot of hair you've got, too. No chance of a bruise showing."

Linda licked her lips and said slowly, despising the hoarsely quavering voice she heard: "I think you've broken my neck or something, I'm paralyzed."

"No," Dosteval contradicted with quiet satisfaction, "that's the injection I just gave you. Old Pevsner's a disgrace but he

knows anesthetics. The stuff making you all docile is something veterinarians use. Very easy for the pathologist to miss, if there's enough left of you for a real post-mortem."

He was so casual, no trace of gloating, that Linda abandoned any notion of preserving cover and said in a rush, "Look, I'm a police officer."

Gary Dosteval, faintly surprised, said, "Of course you are—that's why I've got to get rid of you." He checked his watch. "When Len told me about you rooting out that Mr. Roy message..." His shoulders shifted uneasily and then he regained control and went on, "I bounced him off a wall or two last night, for letting you go. But I'm gambling, see. There's a good chance you swallowed his tale, Len Batch is an idiot but he can't be wrong every time. Or if you did cotton on that it mattered, then maybe you haven't passed it to your bosses yet. Either way, I'm getting rid of you, old love. Whatever happens, you'll cost me a fortune, on account of us not being able to use the Dover route until it's dead certain the law isn't onto it."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" Her sincerity—oh God, now her lips were going numb, unless that was auto-suggestion—was evident.

Dosteval chuckled abruptly. "Very good. Oscar-winning stuff."

"Look, if you know I'm police, it's crazy to..." Linda McCaig couldn't finish the sentence.

He shrugged philosophically. "Oh, they'll suspect. Only natural. But proof... This place is a right firetrap, you wandered in tonight, maybe left something behind and came back for it. The fire broke out—any minute now, I must make tracks, get my alibi nailed down tight—you were overcome by smoke. There'll be no marks of violence on you, if there's much *you* left, as I was saying."

Gary Dosteval straightened from his crouch, dusting his hands together in a fearful gesture of finality. "The moral is, don't go poking your nasty copper's snout where it's not wanted. Speaking for myself, I've found that folks as mind their own bloody business tend to live a lot longer."

Drenched with sweat, nauseous, Linda McCaig confirmed that she couldn't move and weeping messily though silently, tried to come to terms with death. A strand of her darkening, whimpering mind pleaded that Len Batch wasn't a killer, that Dosteval had tricked him into standing her

up. Len would sneak in soon and find her and—

No, Batch wouldn't lift a finger to save her, not with money at stake. Otherwise he'd never have told his partner about their assignation in the first place, presenting Gary Dosteval with a perfect ambush.

Linda was so frantically absorbed in the mental debate that the torch beam was lighting her feet, having lanced and wavered around the room, before she noticed it. Her ears were playing tricks, the clamor hardly sounded human and couldn't be English, surely . . . But hazily, she did recognize Topsy Goggins.

Ms. Goggins spluttered, "Where is he? You can't hide, damn you!" She bent over Linda, seemingly using the column of light from the torch as a stick on which to rest. "Dirty trollop, cover yerself up!"

"Help me," Linda mouthed.

"Worse than animals, sneaking in here to roll about on the floor . . . *where is he?*" She set off again, peering and pouncing. Obviously she'd been watching the house, seen Gary Dosteval go in, and—for she really wasn't too swift—failed to understand that Dosteval, elusive by habit, must have slipped out another way.

Linda invested her dwindling willpower and physical energy

in a gasping yowl like a kitten's. Topsy Goggins returned to glare and then gape, go down on one knee. "What have you two been up to . . . Gawd, what's 'e *done* to you?"

Behind the women an extraordinary sound erupted: extraordinary because it was as much sensation as sound, a vast belch with a blast of heat. The walls jumped into visibility, glowing orange. WDC McCaig didn't need to husk, "Fire." Her parting impression was that Topsy Goggins was about to throttle her.

"S he hauled you out to safety," Superintendent Mells explained. "Very nearly yanked your head off doing it, not by accident I dare say, but Topsy did the business." He beamed down at Linda McCaig. The bed in a private room off a ward at St. Asaph's Hospital wasn't very big, but she was so pale and passive that it seemed to dwarf her.

Mells, tiresomely benevolent and stuffy even for him, nodded several times. "It turned out astonishingly well, considering," he said. "You were very headstrong, insubordinate, we told you not to go off on your own, always keep us in the picture. . . . Then again, it worked."

Leaning against the door, In-



spector Pyne spoke with quiet violence. "You *ever* pull something like that again . . . !"

Superintendent Mells clicked his tongue reprovingly. "Don't go on about it, Dick." And to the girl, "It's far easier getting search warrants in a matter of attempted murder than for unsubstantiated theories about drug smuggling."

"By the time you were rescued from that place, Leonard Batch was judging a beauty contest at the Dorchester in front of three hundred people and Gary Dosteval was playing squash at a Putney health club. Setting their alibis, d'you see. When Dosteval returned to his flat we were on the scene, the floorboards were up, the heroin and cocaine in bulk was already being removed."

Richard Pyne affirmed, "Whole houses of cards is coming a'tumble, luv. Dosteval won't say a word at present, but Len Batch is gutless, desperate to get out from under, very anxious to confide in us. Pevsner, or whatever his real handle is, turns out to be an illegal immigrant terrified of going back behind the Iron Curtain, and he does love his drink, so *he's* singing away for dear life. Same with the bent customs officer at Dover—knows he's got no chance, might as well cough the lot about his involvement."

"You've lost me," Linda McCaig whispered wearily. The cliché made Inspector Pyne feel queasy, since they very nearly had. "Why did Topsy turn up like the U.S. Cavalry, that's all I want to know."

Mells looked at his watch. "You're not to exert yourself, we've been given strict instructions not to stay too long and unlike certain people, we observe the rules." But then he relented.

"Topsy Goggins has another name, seems to be rather a feature of Leonard Associates. You mightn't think it, but Topsy's father is modestly affluent, made money in scrap metal out Lewisham way. Desperate to marry her off, so when a bright spark offered to do the decent thing in return for a bankroll, Herbie Goggins jumped at the chance. But there were strings—Topsy's a highly possessive, jealous lady and she made her dad insist that she have the right to keep an eye on her husband. That's why she kept sniping at you, my dear: simple jealousy."

Linda, amazed, whispered, "*Len Batch is her husband?*"

"She got terribly upset when Batch made a play for you," Superintendent Mells conceded. For some reason he was slyly amused. "Of course, not letting on that you're married to the

boss is standard procedure in many small firms, not just dodgy ones. Can be useful—staff blurt out things to another wage-slave that they'd hide from the gaffer's wife, you follow?"

Something didn't fit. Linda McCaig managed to sit up, head still swimming. "Hang on, Len never went to the house, he stood me up. Dosteval went instead. So why did Topsy . . ."

Mells said, "She gathered you had some sort of assignation in the air. If Batch was making passes, Topsy calculated, then others might follow suit. It made sense in her silly head and as so often happens with people modestly endowed in the top story, she happened to be right for the wrong reasons.

"She watched the house in Tillingen Square and sure enough Gary Dosteval went in, followed by your good self, and apparently neither of you came out. Red rag to a bull, was that."

Richard Pyne, smiling grudgingly, said, "Can you see a Jack the Lad like Len Batch getting shackled to our Topsy, even for a bankroll? Topsy Goggins wasn't planning to save you—fair play, she never realized murder was involved. She was trying to save her husband from you. Thank your lucky stars that Topsy is Mrs. Gary Dosteval."

"And," Mells added piously, "thank God for old fashioned jealousy."

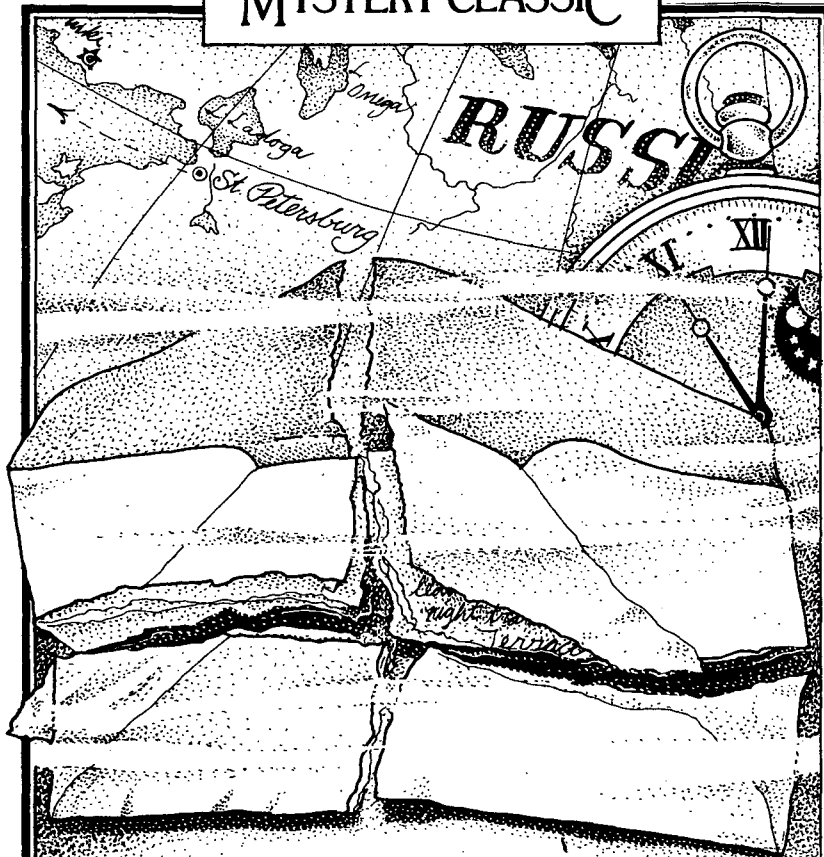
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## **SOLUTION TO THE NOVEMBER "UNSOLVED":**

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George is a Pink; William is also a Pink; Edward is a Blue.

MYSTERY CLASSIC



# In the Fog

(Part III)

by Richard Harding Davis

## SYNOPSIS OF PARTS I AND II

Five members sit in the exclusive Grill Club in London on the night after the great fog of 1897. All are strangers to each other. Two of the men, the baronet Sir Andrew and a gentleman with a black pearl stud, are members of Parliament and on opposing sides in the debate over the Navy Increase Bill. The man with the black pearl stud would give anything to keep Sir Andrew from Parliament until the bill has been voted on, and he reveals to the other three that Sir Andrew is hopelessly addicted to mysteries. As the baronet rises to leave, one of the others begins to narrate a story. He tells them he is Lieutenant Ripley Sears, an American naval attaché. Lost in the fog the previous night, he came upon a mansion with an open front door, a sleeping Russian servant, and two corpses. Sears deduced that one of the bodies was that of the famous explorer, Lord Chetney, just back that day from Africa. The other was a mysterious and beautiful woman. Sears had seen another man running from the house; a calling card identified him as Chetney's younger brother, Arthur. Sears took his story to the London police, who surmised that the murdered woman was the Russian Princess Zichy. They set out to find and question Arthur Chetney, but both he and the mysterious mansion had disappeared in the fog. Even now, Sears tells his rapt audience, the police are searching London for a killer and his victims.

As the story ends, Sir Andrew rises and again moves to depart for Parliament. But one of the others stops him, remarking that he had once met the Princess Zichy and, on that occasion, she had tried to steal a diamond necklace from him. Sir Andrew sinks back into his chair. The second storyteller is a Queen's Messenger who had been carrying the necklace by train to Nice, to hand it to the Russian ambassador as a present for the czarina. At the last minute, a beautiful woman joined him in his train compartment. She was a delightful companion but kept sending him away on one errand after another, until, at a short halt near the end of the trip, she sent him on a breathless chase after her nonexistent maid, Natalie. The unsuspecting messenger gallantly handed her off the train at Marseilles and almost instantly realized that his cigar case, with the czarina's diamonds inside, was missing. He raised the alarm, had the chief of police deploy hundreds of men in the search. A few hours later, he reached into his jacket for his cigars, in his other cigar case, and found the diamonds. The princess—for she was the mystery woman—had learned that he used his cigar case for valuables, but in her haste had stolen the *wrong one*. The diamonds were delivered safely to Nice and several months later, the messenger got a gold cigar case from the czar with his monogram in diamonds.

## Part III. THE SOLICITOR'S STORY.

Sir Andrew rose, with disapproval written in every lineament.

"I thought your story would bear upon the murder," he said. "Had I imagined it would have nothing whatsoever to do with it, I would not have remained." He pushed back his chair and bowed stiffly. "I wish you good night," he said.

There was a chorus of remonstrance, and under cover of this and the baronet's answering protests a servant for the second time slipped a piece of paper into the hand of the gentleman with the pearl stud. He read the lines written upon it and tore it into tiny fragments.

The youngest member, who had remained an interested but silent listener to the tale of the Queen's Messenger, raised his hand commandingly.

"Sir Andrew," he cried, "in justice to Lord Arthur Chetney I must ask you to be seated. He has been accused of a most serious crime, and I insist that you remain until you have heard me clear his character."

"You?" cried the baronet.

"Yes," answered the young man briskly. "I would have spoken sooner," he explained, "but that I thought this gentleman"—he inclined his head toward the Queen's Messenger—"was about to contribute some facts of which I was ignorant. He, however, has told us nothing, and so I will take up the tale at the point where Lieutenant Sears laid it down, and give you those details of which Lieutenant Sears is ignorant. It seems strange to you that I should be able to add the sequel to this story. But the coincidence, when explained, is obvious enough. I am the junior member of the law firm of Chudleigh and Chudleigh. We have been solicitors for the Chetneys for the last two hundred years. Nothing, no matter how unimportant, which concerns Lord Edam and his two sons is unknown to us, and naturally we were acquainted with every detail of the terrible catastrophe of last night."

The baronet, bewildered but eager, sank back into his chair.

"Will you be long, sir?" he demanded.

"I shall endeavor to be brief," said the young solicitor; "and," he added, in a tone which gave his words almost the weight of a threat, "I promise to be interesting."

"There is no need to promise that," said Sir Andrew, "I find it much too interesting as it is." He glanced ruefully at the clock and

turned his eyes quickly from it. "Tell the driver of that hansom," he called to the servant, "that I take him by the hour."

"For the last three days," began young Mr. Chudleigh, "as you have probably read in the daily papers, the Marquis of Edam has been at the point of death, and his physicians have never left his house. Every hour he seemed to grow weaker; but although his bodily strength is apparently leaving him forever, his mind has remained clear and active. Late yesterday evening word was received at our office that he wished my father to come at once to Chetney House and to bring with him certain papers. What these papers were is not essential; I mention them only to explain how it was that last night I happened to be at Lord Edam's bedside. I accompanied my father to Chetney House, but at the time we reached there Lord Edam was sleeping, and his physicians refused to have him awakened. My father urged that he should be allowed to receive Lord Edam's instructions concerning the documents, but the physicians would not disturb him, and we all gathered in the library to wait until he should awake of his own accord. It was about one o'clock in the morning, while we were still there, that Inspector Lyle and the officers from Scotland Yard came to arrest Lord Arthur on the charge of murdering his brother. You can imagine our dismay and distress. Like everyone else, I had learned from the afternoon papers that Lord Chetney was not dead, but that he had returned to England. And on arriving at Chetney House I had been told that Lord Arthur had gone to the Bath Hotel to look for his brother and to inform him that if he wished to see their father alive he must come to him at once. Although it was now past one o'clock, Arthur had not returned. None of us knew where Madame Zichy had lived, so we could not go to recover Lord Chetney's body. We spent a most miserable night, hastening to the window whenever a cab came into the square, in the hope that it was Arthur returning, and endeavoring to explain away the facts that pointed to him as the murderer. I am a friend of Arthur's, I was with him at Harrow and at Oxford, and I refused to believe for an instant that he was capable of such a crime; but as a lawyer I could not but see that the circumstantial evidence was strongly against him.

"Toward early morning Lord Edam awoke, and in so much better a state of health that he refused to make the changes in the papers which he had intended, declaring that he was no nearer death than ourselves. Under other circumstances this happy change in him

would have relieved us greatly, but none of us could think of anything save the death of his elder son and of the charge which hung over Arthur.

"As long as Inspector Lyle remained in the house my father decided that I, as one of the legal advisers of the family, should also remain there. But there was little for either of us to do. Arthur did not return, and nothing occurred until late this morning, when Lyle received word that the Russian servant had been arrested. He at once drove to Scotland Yard to question him. He came back to us in an hour and informed me that the servant had refused to tell anything of what had happened the night before, or of himself, or of the Princess Zichy. He would not even give them the address of her house.

" 'He is in abject terror,' Lyle said. 'I assured him that he was not suspected of the crime, but he would tell me nothing.'

"There were no other developments until two o'clock this afternoon, when word was brought to us that Arthur had been found, and that he was lying in the accident ward of St. George's Hospital. Lyle and I drove there together, and found him propped up in bed with his head bound in a bandage. He had been brought to the hospital the night before by the driver of a hansom that had run over him in the fog. The cab horse had kicked him on the head and he had been carried in unconscious. There was nothing on him to tell who he was, and it was not until he came to his senses this afternoon that the hospital authorities had been able to send word to his people. Lyle at once informed him that he was under arrest, and with what he was charged, and though the inspector warned him to say nothing which might be used against him, I, as his solicitor, instructed him to speak freely and to tell us all he knew of the occurrences of last night. It was evident to anyone that the fact of his brother's death was of much greater concern to him than that he was accused of his murder.

" 'That—' Arthur said contemptuously, 'that is nonsense! It is monstrous and cruel. We parted better friends than we have been for years. I will tell you all that happened—not to clear myself, but to help you to find out the truth.' His story is as follows: Yesterday afternoon, owing to his constant attendance on his father, he did not look at the evening papers, and it was not until after dinner, when the butler brought him one and told him of its contents, that he learned that his brother was alive and at the Bath Hotel. He drove there at once, but was told that about eight o'clock his brother had gone out, but without giving any clue to his destination. As



Chetney had not at once come to see his father, Arthur decided that he was still angry with him, and his mind, turning naturally to the cause of their quarrel, determined him to look for Chetney at the home of the Princess Zichy.

"Her house had been pointed out to him, and, though he had never visited it, he had passed it many times and knew its exact location. He accordingly drove in that direction, as far as the fog would permit the hansom to go, and walked the rest of the way, reaching the house about nine o'clock. He rang, and was admitted by the Russian servant. The man took his card into the drawing room, and at once his brother ran out and welcomed him. He was followed by the Princess Zichy, who also received Arthur most cordially.

" 'You brothers will have much to talk about,' she said. 'I am going to the dining room. When you have finished, let me know.'

"As soon as she had left them, Arthur told his brother that their father was not expected to outlive the night, and that he must come to him at once.

" 'This is not the time to remember your quarrel,' Arthur said to him; 'you have come back from the dead only in time to make your peace with him before he dies.'

"Arthur says that Chetney was greatly moved at what he told him.

" 'You entirely misunderstand me, Arthur,' he returned. 'I did not know the governor was ill, or I would have gone to him the instant I arrived. My only reason for not doing so was because I thought he was still angry with me. I shall return with you immediately, as soon as I have said goodbye to the princess. It is a final goodbye. After tonight I shall never see her again.'

" 'Do you mean that?' Arthur cried.

" 'Yes,' Chetney answered. 'When I returned to London, I had no intention of seeking her again, and I am here only through a mistake.' He then told Arthur that he had separated from the princess even before he went to Central Africa, and that, moreover, while at Cairo on his way south he had learned certain facts concerning her life there during the previous season which made it impossible for him ever to wish to see her again. Their separation was final and complete.

" 'She deceived me cruelly,' he said; 'I cannot tell you how cruelly. During the two years when I was trying to obtain the governor's consent to our marriage she was in love with a Russian diplomat. During all that time he was secretly visiting her here in London,

and her trip to Cairo was only an excuse to meet him there.'

" 'Yet you are here with her tonight,' Arthur protested, 'only a few hours after your return!'

" 'That is easily explained,' Chetney answered. 'I had just finished dinner tonight at the hotel when I received a note from her from this address. In it she said she had just learned of my arrival and begged me to come to her at once. She wrote that she was in great and present trouble, dying of an incurable illness, and without friends or money. She begged me, for the sake of old times, to come to her assistance. During the last two years in the jungle all my former feeling for Zichy has utterly passed away from me, but no one could have dismissed the appeal she made in that letter. So I drove here and found her, as you have seen her, quite as beautiful as ever she was, in very good health, and, from the look of the house, in no need of money.'

" 'I asked her what she meant by writing me that she was dying in a garret, and she laughed and said she had done so because she was afraid unless I thought she needed help I would not try to see her. That was where we were when you arrived. And now,' Chetney added, 'I will say goodbye to her, and you had better return home. No, you can trust me. I shall follow you at once. She has no influence over me now, but I believe, in spite of the way she has used me, that she is still fond of me after her queer fashion, and when she learns that this goodbye is final there may be a scene. And it is not fair to her that you should be here. So go home at once and tell the governor that I am following you in ten minutes.'

" 'That,' said Arthur, 'is the way we parted. I never left him on more friendly terms. I was happy to see him alive again, I was happy to think he had returned in time to make up his quarrel with my father, and I was happy that at last he was clear of that woman. I was never better pleased with him in my life.' He turned to Inspector Lyle, who was sitting at the foot of the bed taking notes of all he told us.

" 'Why, in the name of common sense,' he cried, 'should I have chosen that moment of all others to send my brother back to the grave again?' For a moment the inspector did not answer him. I do not know if any of you gentlemen are acquainted with Inspector Lyle, but if you are not, I should tell you that he is a very remarkable man. Our firm often applies to him for aid, and he has never failed us yet; my father has the greatest possible respect for him. Where he has the advantage over the ordinary police official is in the fact that he possesses imagination. He imagines himself

to be the criminal, imagines how he would act under the same circumstances, and he imagines to such purpose that he generally finds the man he wants. I have often told Lyle that if he had not been a detective, he would have made a great success as a poet or a playwright.

"When Arthur turned on him, Lyle hesitated for a moment and then told him exactly what was the case against him.

" 'Ever since your brother was reported as having died in Africa,' he said, 'your lordship has been collecting money on *post obits*. Lord Chetney's arrival last night turned them into waste paper. You were suddenly in debt for thousands of pounds—for much more than you could ever possibly pay. No one knew that you and your brother had met at Madame Zichy's. But you knew that your father was not expected to outlive the night, and that if your brother were dead also, you would be saved from complete ruin, and that you would become the Marquis of Edam.'

" 'Oh! that is how you have worked it out, is it?' Arthur cried. 'And for me to become Lord Edam, was it necessary that the woman should die, too?'

" 'They will say,' Lyle answered, 'that she was a witness to the murder—that she would have told.'

" 'Then why did I not kill the servant as well?' Arthur said.

" 'He was asleep, and saw nothing.'

" 'And you believe *that*?' Arthur demanded.

" 'It is not a question of what I believe,' Lyle said gravely. 'It is a question for your peers.'

" 'The man is insolent!' Arthur cried. 'The thing is monstrous! Horrible!'

"Before we could stop him, he sprang out of his cot and began pulling on his clothes. When the nurses tried to hold him down, he fought with them.

" 'Do you think you can keep me here,' he shouted, 'when they are plotting to hang me? I am going with you to that house!' he cried to Lyle. 'When you find those bodies, I shall be beside you. It is my right. He is my brother. He has been murdered, and I can tell you who murdered him. That woman murdered him. She first ruined his life, and now she has killed him. For the last five years she has been plotting to make herself his wife, and last night, when he told her he had discovered the truth about the Russian, and that she would never see him again, she flew into a passion and stabbed him, and then, in terror of the gallows, killed herself. She murdered him, I tell you, and promise you that we shall find the

knife she used near her—perhaps still in her hand. What will you say to that?’

‘Lyle turned his head away and stared down at the floor. ‘I might say,’ he answered, ‘that you placed it there.’

‘Arthur gave a cry of anger and sprang at him, and then pitched forward into his arms. The blood was running from the cut under the bandage and he had fainted. Lyle carried him back to the bed again, and we left him with the police and the doctors and drove at once to the address he had given us. We found the house not three minutes’ walk from St. George’s Hospital. It stands in Trevor Terrace, that little row of houses set back from Knightsbridge with one end in Hill Street.

‘As we left the hospital, Lyle had said to me, ‘You must not blame me for treating him as I did. All is fair in this work, and if by angering that boy I could have made him commit himself, I was right in trying to do so; though, I assure you, no one would be better pleased than myself if I could prove his theory to be correct. But we cannot tell. Everything depends upon what we see for ourselves within the next few minutes.’

‘When we reached the house, Lyle broke open the fastenings of one of the windows on the ground floor, and, hidden by the trees in the garden, we scrambled in. We found ourselves in the reception room, which was the first room on the right of the hall. The gas was still burning behind the colored glass and red silk shades, and when the daylight streamed in after us, it gave the hall a hideously dissipated look, like the foyer of a theater at a *matinée*, or the entrance to an all-day gambling hall. The house was oppressively silent, and because we knew why it was so silent we spoke in whispers. When Lyle turned the handle of the drawing room door, I felt as though someone had put his hand upon my throat. But I followed close at his shoulder and saw, in the subdued light of many tinted lamps, the body of Chetney at the foot of the divan, just as Lieutenant Sears has described it. In the drawing room we found upon the floor the body of the Princess Zichy, her arms thrown out, and the blood from her heart frozen in a tiny line across her bare shoulder. But neither of us, although we searched the floor on our hands and knees, could find the weapon which had killed her.

‘‘For Arthur’s sake,’ I said, ‘I would give a thousand pounds if we had found the knife in her hand, as he said we would.’

‘‘That we have not found it there,’ Lyle answered, ‘is to my mind the strongest proof that he is telling the truth—that he left the

house before the murder took place. He is not a fool, and had he stabbed his brother and this woman he would have seen that by placing the knife near her he could help to make it appear as if she had killed Chetney and then committed suicide. Besides, Lord Arthur insisted that the evidence in his behalf would be our finding the knife here. He would not have urged that if he knew we would *not* find it, if he knew he himself had carried it away. This is not suicide. A suicide does not rise and hide the weapon with which he kills himself, and then lie down again. No, this has been a double murder, and we must look outside the house for the murderer.'

"While he was speaking, Lyle and I had been searching every corner, studying the details of each room. I was so afraid that, without telling me, he would make some deductions prejudicial to Arthur, that I never left his side. I was determined to see everything that he saw, and, if possible, to prevent his interpreting it in the wrong way. He finally finished his examination, and we sat down together in the drawing room, and he took out his notebook and read aloud all Mr. Sears had told him of the murder, and what we had just learned from Arthur. We compared the two accounts, word for word, and weighed statement with statement. But I could not determine from anything Lyle said which of the two versions he had decided to believe.

" 'We are trying to build a house of blocks,' he exclaimed, 'with half of the blocks missing. We have been considering two theories,' he went on: 'one, that Lord Arthur is responsible for both murders, and the other, that the dead woman in there is responsible for one of them, and has committed suicide; but until the Russian servant is ready to talk, I shall refuse to believe in the guilt of either.'

" 'What can you prove by him?' I asked. 'He was drunk and asleep. He saw nothing.'

"Lyle hesitated and then, as though he had made up his mind to be quite frank with me, spoke freely.

" 'I do not know that he was either drunk or asleep,' he answered. 'Lieutenant Sears describes him as a stupid boor. I am not satisfied that he is not a clever actor. What was his position in this house? What was his real duty here? Suppose it was not to guard this woman, but to watch her. Let us imagine that it was not the woman he served, but a master, and see where that leads us. For this house has a master, a mysterious, absentee landlord, who lives in St. Petersburg, the unknown Russian who came between Chetney and Zichy, and because of whom Chetney left her. He is the man who

bought this house for Madame Zichy, who sent these rugs and curtains from Petersburg to furnish it for her after his own tastes, and, I believe, it was he also who placed the Russian servant here, ostensibly to serve the princess, but in reality to spy upon her. At Scotland Yard we do not know who this gentleman is; the Russian police confess to equal ignorance concerning him. When Lord Chetney went to Africa, Madame Zichy lived in St. Petersburg; but there her receptions and dinners were so crowded with members of the nobility and of the army and diplomats, that among so many visitors the police could not learn which was the one for whom she most greatly cared.'

"Lyle pointed at the modern French paintings and the heavy silk rugs which hung upon the walls.

" 'The unknown is a man of taste and of some fortune,' he said, 'not the sort of man to send a stupid peasant to guard the woman he loves. So I am not content to believe with Mr. Sears that the man is a boor. I believe him instead to be a very clever ruffian. I believe him to be the protector of his master's honor, or, let us say, of his master's property, whether that property be silver plate or the woman his master loves. Last night, after Lord Arthur had gone away, the servant was left alone in this house with Lord Chetney and Madame Zichy. From where he sat in the hall he could hear Lord Chetney bidding her farewell; for, if my idea of him is correct, he understands English quite as well as you or I. Let us imagine that he heard her entreating Chetney not to leave her, reminding him of his former wish to marry her, and let us suppose that he hears Chetney denounce her, and tell her that at Cairo he has learned of this Russian admirer—the servant's master. He hears the woman declare that she has had no admirer but himself, that this unknown Russian was, and is, nothing to her, that there is no man she loves but him, and that she cannot live, knowing that he is alive, without his love. Suppose Chetney believed her, suppose his former infatuation for her returned, and that in a moment of weakness he forgave her and took her in his arms. That is the moment the Russian master has feared. It is to guard against it that he has placed his watchdog over the princess; and how do we know but that, when the moment came, the watchdog served his master, as he saw his duty, and killed them both? What do you think?' Lyle demanded. 'Would not that explain both murders?'

"I was only too willing to hear any theory which pointed to anyone else as the criminal than Arthur, but Lyle's explanation

was too utterly fantastic. I told him that he certainly showed imagination, but that he could not hang a man only for what he imagined he had done.

"No," Lyle answered, 'but I can frighten him by telling him what I think he has done, and now when I again question the Russian servant I will make it quite clear to him that I believe he is the murderer. I think that will open his mouth. A man will at least talk to defend himself. Come,' he said, 'we must return at once to Scotland Yard and see him. There is nothing more to do here.'

"He arose, and I followed him into the hall, and in another minute we should have been on our way to Scotland Yard. But just as he opened the street door a postman halted at the gate of the garden and began fumbling with the latch.

"Lyle stopped, with an exclamation of chagrin.

"How stupid of me!" he exclaimed. He turned quickly and pointed to a narrow slit cut in the brass plate of the front door. 'The house has a private letter box,' he said, 'and I had not thought to look in it! If we had gone out as we came in, by the window, I should never have seen it. The moment I entered the house I should have thought of securing the letters which came this morning. I have been grossly careless.' He stepped back into the hall and pulled at the lid of the letter box, which hung on the inside of the door, but it was tightly locked. At the same moment the postman came up the steps holding a letter. Without a word Lyle took it from his hand and began to examine it. It was addressed to the Princess Zichy, and on the back of the envelope was the name of a West End dressmaker.

"That is of no use to me," Lyle said. He took out his card and showed it to the postman. 'I am Inspector Lyle, from Scotland Yard,' he said. 'The people in this house are under arrest. Everything it contains is now in my keeping. Did you deliver any other letters here this morning?'

"The man looked frightened, but answered promptly that he was now upon his third round. He had made one postal delivery at seven that morning and another at eleven.

"How many letters did you leave here?" Lyle asked.

"About six altogether," the man answered.

"Did you put them through the door into the letter box?"

"The postman said, 'Yes, I always slip them into the box, and ring and go away. The servants collect them from the inside.'

"Have you noticed if any of the letters you leave here bear a



Russian postage stamp?" Lyle asked.

"The man answered, 'Oh, yes, sir, a great many.'

" 'From the same person, would you say?'

" 'The writing seems to be the same,' the man answered. 'They come regularly about once a week—one of those I delivered this morning had a Russian postmark.'

" 'That will do,' said Lyle eagerly. 'Thank you, thank you very much.'

"He ran back into the hall and, pulling out his penknife, began to pick at the lock of the letter box.

" 'I have been supremely careless,' he said in great excitement. 'Twice before when people I wanted had flown from a house I have been able to follow them by putting a guard over their mailbox. These letters, which arrive regularly every week from Russia in the same handwriting—they can come but from one person. At least we shall now know the name of the master of this house. Undoubtedly it is one of his letters that the man placed here this morning. We may make a most important discovery.'

"As he was talking he was picking at the lock with his knife, but he was so impatient to reach the letters that he pressed too heavily on the blade and it broke in his hand. I took a step backward and drove my heel into the lock and burst it open. The lid flew back, and we pressed forward, and each ran his hand down into the letter box. For a moment we were both too startled to move. The box was empty!

"I do not know how long we stood staring stupidly at each other, but it was Lyle who was the first to recover. He seized me by the arm and pointed excitedly into the empty box.

" 'Do you appreciate what that means?' he cried. 'It means that someone has been here ahead of us. Someone has entered this house not three hours before we came, since eleven o'clock this morning.'

" 'It was the Russian servant!' I exclaimed.

" 'The Russian servant has been under arrest at Scotland Yard,' Lyle cried. 'He could not have taken the letters. Lord Arthur has been in his cot at the hospital. That is his alibi. There is someone else—someone we do not suspect—and that someone is the murderer. He came back here either to obtain those letters because he knew they would convict him, or to remove something he had left here at the time of the murder, something incriminating—the weapon, perhaps, or some personal article: a cigarette case, a handkerchief with his name upon it, or a pair of gloves. Whatever it was, it must have been damning evidence against him to have

made him take so desperate a chance.'

" 'How do we know,' I whispered, 'that he is not hidden here now?'

" 'No, I'll swear he is not!' Lyle answered. 'I may have bungled in some things, but I have searched this house thoroughly. Nevertheless,' he added, 'we must go over it again, from the cellar to the roof. We have the real clue now, and we must forget the others and work only it.' As he spoke he began again to search the drawing room, turning over even the books on the tables and the music on the piano.

" 'Whoever the man is,' he said over his shoulder, 'we know that he has a key to the front door and a key to the letter box. That shows us he is either an inmate of the house or that he comes here when he wishes. The Russian says that he was the only servant in the house. Certainly we have found no evidence to show that any other servant slept here. There could be but one other person who would possess a key to the house and the letter box—and he lives in St. Petersburg. At the time of the murder he was two thousand miles away.' Lyle interrupted himself suddenly with a sharp cry and turned upon me with his eyes flashing. 'But was he?' he cried. 'Was he? How do we know that last night he was not in London, in this very house when Zichy and Chetney met here?'

"He stood staring at me without seeing me, muttering and arguing with himself.

" 'Don't speak to me!' he cried, as I ventured to interrupt him. 'I can see it now. It is all plain to me. It was not the servant, but his master, the Russian himself, and it was he who came back for the letters. He came back for them because he knew they would convict him. We must find them. We must have those letters. If we find one with the Russian postmark, we shall have found the murderer.' He spoke like a madman, and as he spoke he ran around the room with one hand held out in front of him as you have seen a mind reader at a theater seeking for something hidden in the stalls. He pulled the old letters from the writing desk and ran them over as swiftly as a gambler deals out cards; he dropped on his knees before the fireplace and dragged out the dead coals with his bare fingers, and then with a low, worried cry, like a hound on a scent, he ran back to the wastepaper basket and, lifting the papers from it, shook them out upon the floor. Instantly he gave a shout of triumph and, separating a number of torn pieces from the others, held them up before me.

" 'Look!' he cried. 'Do you see? Here are five letters, torn across

in two places. The Russian did not stop to read them, for, as you see, he has left them still sealed. I have been wrong. He did not return for the letters. He could not have known their value. He must have returned for some other reason, and, as he was leaving, saw the letter box, and taking out the letters, held them together—so—and tore them twice across, and then, as the fire had gone out, tossed them into this basket. Look!" he cried, "here in the upper corner of this piece is a Russian stamp. This is his own letter—unopened!"

"We examined the Russian stamp and found it had been canceled in St. Petersburg four days ago. The back of the envelope bore the postmark of the branch station in Upper Sloane Street and was dated this morning. The envelope was of official blue paper, and we had no difficulty in finding the two other parts to it. We drew the torn pieces of the letter from them and joined them together side by side. There were but two lines of writing, and this was the message: 'I leave Petersburg on the night train, and I shall see you at Trevor Terrace after dinner Monday evening.'

"That was last night!" Lyle cried. "He arrived twelve hours ahead of his letter—but it came in time—it came in time to hang him!"

The baronet struck the table with his hand.

"The name!" he demanded. "How was it signed? What was the man's name?"

The young solicitor rose to his feet and, leaning forward, stretched out his arm. "There was no name," he cried. "The letter was signed with only two initials. But engraved at the top of the sheet was the man's address. That address was 'THE AMERICAN EMBASSY, ST. PETERSBURG, BUREAU OF THE NAVAL ATTACHE,' and the initials," he shouted, his voice rising into an exultant and bitter cry, "were those of the gentleman who sits opposite, who told us that he was the first to find the murdered bodies, the naval attaché to Russia, Lieutenant Ripley Sears!"

A strained and awful hush followed the solicitor's words, which seemed to vibrate in the air like a twanging bowstring which had just hurled its bolt. Sir Andrew, pale and staring, drew away with an exclamation of repulsion. His eyes were fastened upon the naval attaché with fascinated horror. But the American emitted a sigh of great content and sank comfortably into the arms of his chair. He clapped his hands softly together.

"Capital!" he murmured. "I give you my word I never guessed what you were driving at. You fooled me, I'll be hanged if you didn't—you certainly fooled me!"

The man with the pearl stud leaned forward with a nervous gesture. "Hush! Be careful!" he whispered. But at that instant, for the third time, a servant hastening through the room handed him a piece of paper, which he scanned eagerly. The message on the paper read, "The light over the Commons is out. The House has risen."

The man with the black pearl gave a mighty shout and tossed the paper from him on the table.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "The House is up! We've won!" He caught up his glass and slapped the naval attaché violently upon the shoulder. He nodded joyously at him, at the solicitor, and at the Queen's Messenger. "Gentlemen, to you!" he cried: "my thanks and my congratulations!" He drank deep from the glass and breathed forth a long sigh of satisfaction and relief.

"But I say!" protested the Queen's Messenger, shaking his finger violently at the solicitor, "that story won't do. You didn't play fair—and—and you talked so fast I couldn't make out what it was all about. I'll bet you that evidence wouldn't hold in a court of law—you couldn't hang a cat on such evidence. Your story is condemned tommyrot. Now, my story might have happened, my story bore the mark—"

In the joy of creation the storytellers had forgotten their audience, until a sudden exclamation from Sir Andrew caused them to turn guiltily toward him. His face was knit with lines of anger, doubt, and amazement.

"What does this mean?" he cried. "Is this a jest, or are you mad? If you know this man is a murderer, why is he at large? Is this a game you have been playing? Explain yourselves at once. What does it mean?"

The American, with first a glance at the others, rose and bowed courteously.

"I am not a murderer, Sir Andrew, believe me," he said; "you need not be alarmed. As a matter of fact, at this moment I am much more afraid of you than you could possibly be of me. I beg you please to be indulgent. I assure you we meant no disrespect. We have been matching stories, that is all, pretending that we are people we are not, endeavoring to entertain you with better detective tales than, for instance, the last one you read, *The Great Rand Robbery*."

The baronet brushed his hand nervously across his forehead.

"Do you mean to tell me," he exclaimed, "that none of this has happened? That Lord Chetney is not dead, that his solicitor did not

find a letter of yours written from your post in Petersburg, and that just now, when he charged you with murder, he was in jest?"

"I am really very sorry," said the American, "but you see, sir, he could not have found a letter written by me in St. Petersburg because I have never been in Petersburg. Until this week I have never been outside of my own country. I am not a naval officer. I am a writer of short stories. And tonight, when this gentleman told me that you were fond of detective stories, I thought it would be amusing to tell you one of mine—one I had just mapped out this afternoon."

"But Lord Chetney is a real person," interrupted the baronet, "and he did go to Africa two years ago, and he was supposed to have died there, and his brother, Lord Arthur, has been the heir. And yesterday Chetney did return. I read it in the papers."

"So did I," assented the American soothingly. "And it struck me as being a very good plot for a story. I mean his unexpected return from the dead, and the probable disappointment of the younger brother. So I decided that the younger brother had better murder the elder one. The Princess Zichy I invented out of a clear sky. The fog I did not have to invent. Since last night I know all that there is to know about a London fog. I was lost in one for three hours."

The baronet turned grimly upon the Queen's Messenger.

"But this gentleman," he protested, "he is not a writer of short stories; he is a member of the Foreign Office. I have seen him in Whitehall often, and, according to him, the Princess Zichy is not an invention. He says she is very well known—that she tried to rob him."

The servant of the Foreign Office looked unhappily at the cabinet minister and puffed nervously at his cigar.

"It's true, Sir Andrew, that I am a Queen's Messenger," he said appealingly, "and a Russian woman once did try to rob a Queen's Messenger in a railway carriage—only it did not happen to me, but to a pal of mine. The only Russian princess I ever knew called herself Zabrisky. You may have seen her. She used to do a dive from the roof of the Aquarium."

Sir Andrew, with a snort of indignation, fronted the young solicitor.

"And I suppose yours was a cock-and-bull story, too?" he said. "Of course, it must have been, since Lord Chetney is not dead. But don't tell me," he protested, "that you are not Chudleigh's son, either."

"I'm sorry," said the youngest member, smiling in some embar-

rassment, "but my name is not Chudleigh. I assure you, though, that I know the family very well and that I am on very good terms with them."

"You should be!" exclaimed the baronet; "and, judging from the liberties you take with the Chetneys, you had better be on very good terms with them, too."

The young man leaned back and glanced toward the servants at the far end of the room.

"It has been so long since I have been in the club," he said, "that I doubt if even the waiters remember me. Perhaps Joseph may," he added. "Joseph!" he called, and at the word a servant stepped briskly forward.

The young man pointed to the stuffed head of a great lion which was suspended above the fireplace.

"Joseph," he said, "I want you to tell these gentlemen who shot that lion. Who presented it to the Grill?"

Joseph, unused to acting as master of ceremonies to members of the club, shifted nervously from one foot to the other.

"Why, you—you did," he stammered.

"Of course I did!" exclaimed the young man. "I mean, what is the name of the man who shot it. Tell the gentlemen who I am. They wouldn't believe me."

"Who you are, my lord?" said Joseph. "You are Lord Edam's son, the Earl of Chetney."

"You must admit," said Lord Chetney, when the noise had died away, "that I couldn't remain dead while my little brother was accused of murder. I had to do something. Family pride demanded it. Now, Arthur, as the younger brother, can't afford to be squeamish, but personally I should hate to have a brother of mine hanged for murder."

"You certainly showed no scruples against hanging me," said the American, "but in the face of your evidence I admit my guilt, and I sentence myself to pay the full penalty of the law as we are made to pay it in my own country. The order of this court is," he announced, "that Joseph shall bring me a wine card, and that I sign it for five bottles of the club's best champagne."

"Oh, no!" protested the man with the pearl stud, "it is not for *you* to sign it. In my opinion, it is Sir Andrew who should pay the costs. It is time you knew," he said, turning to that gentleman, "that unconsciously you have been the victim of what I may call a patriotic conspiracy. These stories have had a more serious purpose than merely to amuse. They have been told with the worthy

object of detaining you from the House of Commons. I must explain to you that all through this evening I have had a servant waiting in Trafalgar Square with instructions to bring me word as soon as the light over the House of Commons had ceased to burn. The light is now out, and the object for which we plotted is attained."

The baronet glanced keenly at the man with the black pearl and then quickly at his watch. The smile disappeared from his lips, and his face was set in stern and forbidding lines.

"And may I know," he asked icily, "what was the object of your plot?"

"A most worthy one," the other retorted. "Our object was to keep you from advocating the expenditure of many millions of the people's money upon more battleships. In a word, we have been working together to prevent you from passing the Navy Increase Bill."

Sir Andrew's face bloomed with brilliant color. His body shook with suppressed emotion.

"My dear sir!" he cried, "you should spend more time at the House and less at your club. The Navy Bill was brought up on its third reading at eight o'clock this evening. I spoke for three hours in its favor. My only reason for wishing to return again to the House tonight was to sup on the terrace with my old friend, Admiral Simons; for my work at the House was completed five hours ago, when the Navy Increase Bill was passed by an overwhelming majority."

The baronet rose and bowed. "I have to thank you, sir," he said, "for a most interesting evening."

The American shoved the wine card which Joseph had given him toward the gentleman with the black pearl.

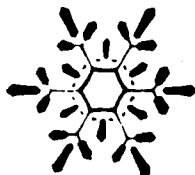
"You sign it," he said.

THE END





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# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



Illustration by Sheila Smith

**L**ate First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt makes her third appearance as an amateur detective in son Elliott Roosevelt's **Murder at Hobcow Barony** (St. Martin's, \$15.95, 233 pp.). The time is the fall of 1937; the place is Bernard Baruch's South Carolina estate. Baruch is a splendid host, Eleanor is tolerant and genteel, as can be expected. But the author has added a motley cast of supporting players—Joan Crawford, Darryl Zanuck, Humphrey Bogart, Walter Winchell, and the zany Tallulah Bankhead—and these folks don't behave in a predictable manner at all. This is lots of fun, and I hope Eleanor Roosevelt has many more mysteries ahead of her.

Dan Mallett fans know him to be a local "character" in the English village he's native to, an unlikely-looking adventurer who chooses to live by his wiles rather than go back to working in a bank (much to his ailing mother's chagrin). Author Frank Parrish has tossed his offbeat protagonist into the center of a fifth novel, this one titled **Fly Cobweb** (Harper & Row, \$14.95, 167 pp.). The book opens quickly, when Dan interrupts a burglary (truth is, someone beat Dan to the punch), and then witnesses the murder of a security guard. It bothers Dan that he'll be unable to come out

into the open and assist the police; it disturbs his sense of justice. It bothers him even more, however, when he learns the identity of the murderer—and knows that the gunman, who could recognize him, will not wish to see Dan go on breathing. Suspense is secondary to characterization in these novels, which are simply funnier than most British mysteries.

Mickey Friedman has drawn a very sympathetic and special protagonist in **Paper Phoenix** (Dutton, \$15.95, 183 pp.). Maggie Longstreet is her name; she's a recently divorced San Francisco socialite, an attractive forty-four-year-old woman who is sinking into a major depression when she reads the obituary of an obnoxious liberal newspaper editor . . . and remembers having overheard her ex-husband on the phone, telling the unknown caller that he won't have to worry about the editor much longer. Those words nag at Maggie until she decides to do a little investigating herself. She proves herself resourceful, spirited, gutsy, and, finally, much better off after it's all over than when she began. It is definitely Maggie's character that makes *Paper Phoenix* more than a standard suspense thriller.

Orania Papazoglou's **Sanctity** (Crown, \$16.95, 372 pp.) is a big, long novel reminiscent of some of Ruth Rendell's psychological thrillers. The setting is the isolated motherhouse and convent of the Society of Mary in contemporary rural Connecticut, an old and very traditional order of nuns. The newly admitted class of women includes three whose fates are connected from the moment they arrive. And one of the three is a psychopathic murderer. *Sanctity* opens in the present, giving readers a glimpse of a violent crime that has just been committed. Then, in mostly short chapters, we get flashback scenes that tell us everything about the beautiful Kat, the innocent Annie, and the abused Jane. All of this background is woven into the story of the days of the postulants' lives, the routines and rituals of the order of nuns, the personalities and dramas of the other convent women. The novel is long but compelling, and the portrait of a deranged mind is chilling.

Virginia and Felix Freer are a very special couple. Once married, now permanently but congenially separated, they team up as a detecting duo for a series of mysteries by E. X. Ferrars. The latest is **I Met Murder**, and it's as agreeable and unexpected as Felix's visits to Virginia's little house in Allingford, England. Things are not what they seem in Allingford, even though it initially seems

like an act of charity for Virginia's childless friends to invite a recently-orphaned young cousin to live with them; even though their new neighbor, a successful novelist, seems like such charming company; even though Felix does have (as anyone can readily see!) a broken leg, which makes it logical that he would show up on Virginia's doorstep hoping for an invitation to stay; and even though the young married relatives of Virginia's friends appear well-to-do themselves. Sigh. Nothing, however, is what it seems. And there are murder and kidnapping and attempted extortion before the Freers ferret out the truth. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$12.95, 187 pp.)

Author Lillian de la Torre is generally credited with first having thought of casting a real historical personage in the role of detective. The year was 1944, the publication was *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, and the hero was Dr. Sam Johnson, a celebrated figure in the eighteenth century. And Dr. Sam came equipped with his own biographer, his own "Watson," in the form of the loyal Boswell. The author's interesting introduction to **The Return of Dr. Sam: Johnson** makes it clear that she has tried for authenticity and historical accuracy, even in her spelling and punctuation. That's worthy of note, as is the author's Boswellian narrative style. But readers don't have to be familiar with the two real characters to enjoy these short stories, which have puzzles at their hearts and overflow with good humor. This is one of five volumes reprinting the exploits of Dr. Sam; if you like short stories for bedtime reading or commuting, try one of them (International Polygonics, Ltd., \$4.95, 187 pp.).

**Oxford Blood** (W.W. Norton, \$13.95, 224 pp.) is the fifth novel to feature Antonia Fraser's young and attractive Jemima Shore, a celebrated investigative reporter with her own national TV show in Britain. There are a few elements in this latest that make it especially appealing. For starters, it opens with the deathbed confession of a professional midwife, a woman who reveals that she helped a well-known lord locate an unwanted baby to give to his wife as her own, who died in childbirth. The baby became the infamous Lord Saffron, one of the most pressworthy and wealthy undergraduates at Oxford. He would surely be included in any documentary about Oxford's "golden lads and lassies," a program Jemima's producer devoutly wishes for and one she's been trying to avoid doing . . . until, that is, the nurse confesses. Jemima is a

bright and liberated woman with a strong sense of curiosity. She makes an ideal modern-day Miss Marple—and, in addition, some of us just can't resist a mystery set in Oxford. This one won't disappoint.

What makes Robert Campbell's **The Junkyard Dog** so different—and consequently so entertaining—is the choice of Jimmy Flannery as protagonist. Flannery is a Chicago Irishman with a secure civil service job which he obtained by political patronage and which he keeps by acting as precinct captain of the Democratic party for his neighborhood, the 27th Ward. Jimmy narrates his own story, which opens when a bomb goes off in an abortion clinic, killing one of Jimmy's constituents (who is also a friend). Everyone tries to get Jimmy to drop his private investigation, and that finally angers the usually even-tempered Irishman, making him as mad as "a junkyard dog." Jimmy, his retired father, and all the folks who populate Jimmy's Chicago are a breath of fresh air for mystery lovers. (Signet, \$2.95, 189 pp.)

Two lighthearted mysteries featuring spunky young women are also out now in paperback and are guaranteed to warm an autumn night. **Chains of Gold** by Margaret Lamb (Ballantine, \$2.95, 244 pp.) features junior magazine editor Penny Miller, who is sent on assignment to the lovely seaside town of Newport. More interesting than the magnificent "cottage" (one of the Newport mansions, in actuality) that Penny is supposed to research are its sole inhabitant, an ancient spinster, and her firm belief that her older sister had not murdered their father—as everyone then supposed—way back in 1930. Parallel to Penny's escapades with the wealthy heir and with a muckraking reporter are the vivid recreations of the past that grow out of Penny's research. There's some romance, humor, mild suspense, and a hefty helping of history in this contemporary mystery.

Sharyn McCrum's heroine in **Highland Laddie Gone** is amateur sleuth Elizabeth MacPherson, here making her third appearance. The setting is a Scottish festival in West Virginia, a serious affair (to the Scottish-American participants, at least) replete with revivals of tradition, food, song, ritual—and clan rivalries. Though a cranky festival figurehead gets himself killed, Elizabeth is at first more concerned about getting clannish with a handsome visiting Scot. But when the ex-husband of her good friend is arrested for the murder—and then when another more likable festival fa-

vorite is killed, too—Elizabeth finds herself with no other choice: she sets out to piece the puzzle together and solve the crimes. (Avon, \$2.95, 181 pp.)

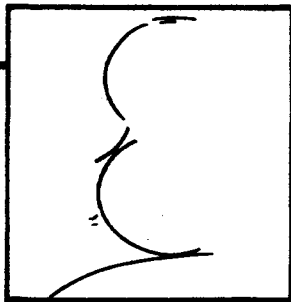
**Moving Targets** (St. Martin's, \$16.95, 311 pp.) by William J. Reynolds is billed as "A Nebraska Mystery." Nebraska is the name of the youngish private eye cum writer who acts as protagonist.\* But if you were hoping for a novel set in Nebraska, you won't be disappointed. Omaha is Nebraska's turf, and the time is winter, when blizzards are a fact of life and even good P.I.'s don't count too heavily on rousing car chases. Nebraska—the place *and* the man—sets *Moving Targets* above the crowd. The man is the narrator of his tales (the first book was titled *The Nebraska Quotient*), and he's a man of wit, sense, and sensibility, with compassion, an almost impossible marital situation, and a yen to quit investigating and become a fulltime writer. The mystery, which opens with the murder of a banker and the disappearance of his daughter, leads him to some fascinating minor characters, and one major psychopath. The trip reveals some of the darker places in the lives of the lonely rich, reminding one of Ross Macdonald. It's not a pretty picture, but Reynolds hasn't bloodied it up unnecessarily either.

Niagara Falls is the location for Howard Engel's latest, **Murder on Location** (Penguin, \$3.50, 222 pp.). No-nonsense private investigator Benny Cooperman, who lives in nearby Canada, follows the trail of a missing, stage-struck wife to the spectacular falls. There he finds himself entangled in the affairs of a big Hollywood movie production filming on location. The mob, as investors, have walk-ons too, it seems, and Benny finds himself uncomfortably close to murder. This is a solid private eye mystery, with plenty of characters and subplots, and a dash of action and suspense. Benny, the narrator, hasn't been saddled by his creator with lots of cute eccentricities; he's plain and straightforward, and that's how he tells his tale. The behind-the-scenes look at moviemakers, and the splendor of the falls set against a lot of tawdry tourist-trap surroundings, add something special, too.

\*Readers of AHMM may already be acquainted with Nebraska from two of Reynolds's short stories about him: "The Two Ninety-Nine Alibi" (February 1986) and "Guilt Enough to Go Around" (September 1986).—ED.

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



**T**he only kind of British play that seems never to be exported to Broadway is the good old fashioned mystery puzzler. There are three of these presently playing in London—one recently opened, and two long-running favorites. The new play, **Deadly Nightcap**, starts with the always promising situation of an independently wealthy wife and a greedy, philandering husband bent on murder for love and profit. The trusting wife begins to realize her danger, and avoids drinking his drugged, deadly nightcap. But does she also go so far as to kill him?

The leading evidence, as befits a play, lies in the wife's behavior. The husband almost convinces her that she is suffering from delusions. Then, after his death, she seems genuinely to begin hallucinating. In a dramatically effective ending, her behavior is explained

as the murder, or possibly just a theory about it, is reenacted in a flashback instead of being outlined by the person who solved it.

*Deadly Nightcap* is the equivalent of a strictly cerebral mystery novel. No Peter or Andrew Shaffer-like extravagances of behavior or trick disappearances here. The actors employ a low key, British television style of performance that suits the single set, a contemporary living room. Quietly and smoothly arranged, like an afternoon tea, *Deadly Nightcap* affords an evening in the theater rather like a quiet read at home.

Far more sinister and tension filled is **The Business of Murder**, which has been running since 1981. Here the audience watches the murder plot unfold, understanding that there is a plot but otherwise being no



less in the dark than its intended victims. The questions of what is being planned and why lend bite and interest to the most seemingly innocuous conversations as one gropes toward understanding the play's manipulative, revenging mastermind. He is a deferential, milquetoastish character consumed with savage resentment over, among other things, his mistreatment years earlier by the police.

One's sympathies are with the revenge seeker's victims—another police “superintendent” and his mistress—but ethically one cannot help judging them adversely. As for the mastermind, he grows in loathsomeness but commands a grudging sympathy for his gradually revealed sufferings in the past. At the end the killing takes place on stage, but proves to be so surprising that it is no breach of reviewing ethics to reveal that it *does* take place.

No one of our acquaintance has ever revealed the ending of Agatha Christie's **The Mousetrap** in the course of its record thirty-four-year run. This is the English country house mystery against which all others have to be measured. The house in question is a large, formerly grand structure recently bought by a young couple who have

converted it to a guest house. Their first clients are a delicious collection of English eccentrics; their first night includes a snowstorm, a cut telephone wire, and a murder.

The characters are played broadly but without the smirking irony too often indulged in by American actors in old plays. They include a fantastical, possibly mad Italian, a retired British army major, a mannish young lady, a girlish young architect with the unlikely name of Christopher Wren, and an unpleasant old lady who gets killed. The case is investigated by Detective Sergeant Trotter, who was played in the original 1952 cast by (now) Sir Richard Attenborough.

When, as in *The Mousetrap*, no fewer than five doors open into a murder room, and each person's location at the time of the killing is essential, the stage play is superior to the novel at presenting a reenactment. And no matter how many years go by, the unmatched professionalism of English actors manages to sustain the freshness of this most traditional method of winding up a mystery. As a London paper put it nineteen years after the play opened, “They'll Never Build a Better Mousetrap.” Nor will they ever build a better institution for the presentation of mystery on stage than the London theater.

# THE STORY THAT WON



The July Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by SuAnn Kiser of Palo Alto, California. Honorable mentions go to Kevin Kiser of Palo Alto, California; J. R. Hahn of San Ramon, California; Victoria Hawkins of Cannon Beach, Oregon; J. F. Peirce of Bryan, Texas; John A. Brosnan of Oradell, New Jersey; Mark Truman of Midway City, California; Wayne Doane of Elmira, New York; John Dalbec of Youngstown, Ohio; Dan Corporon of Neosho, Missouri; Harry Weiler of Fort Myers, Florida; and Catherine Balkin of Brooklyn, New York.

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## A GLEAM IN HIS EYE by SuAnn Kiser

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No one knew where Jake Harrigan hid the jewels, except Jake himself. So, when Jake died in prison, everyone thought the secret died with him. But I knew better. I guess Uncle-Jake sent me the letter—the one with the mysterious poem in it—because I was his only living kin. I figured the poem was a clue because Uncle Jake wouldn't be caught dead writing poetry, but I couldn't make head nor tail of it:

The cold white horse  
'Neath the ancient sky  
Watches unseeing  
With a gleam in his eye.

My search began with a trip to the racetrack to check out a horse called Diamond-Eyed Clyde, and ended in the alley behind the Sky's-The-Limit Pub after a nasty run-in with a one-eyed heroin dealer. I decided that Jake must have gone over the edge those last few years, and I didn't want to follow him, so I renewed my pilot's license, took an easy job showing tourists the English countryside from on high, and forgot all about horses and jewels. Until last summer on a charter flight to Wessex Downs. I flew right over him—him all dry and white as a bleached skull, and me shaking so hard I nearly crashed.

That hillside horse is still there, but now he watches over the expensive new Harrigan's Flying School and Charter Service, and the gleam is in *my* eye.

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**CAN** You stuff 1000 envelopes for \$500.00 weekly? Send six 22¢ stamps. Blume, Box 460159, Garland, TX 75046.

**\$EARN BIG BUCKS\$** Proven methods! Seven Guaranteed ways, shown step by step. For **FREE** details, write to: Rivera Publishing Company, Dept. 01, P.O. Box 3825, City of Industry, CA 91744.

\$60.00 per Hundred securing-stuffing envelopes from home. Offer-details: Rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial, P-460, X17410, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

**CLOTHING** Business, the facts on starting a successful store. Send \$4.99, 1202 Pleiades, Vista, Calif. 92083.

**EARN \$5,000 ANY WEEKEND!** Amazing new system makes it easy. No money needed. Skeptical? **FREE PROOF.** Write: Crossroads, Box 5097-B1, Babylon, NY 11707.

460% Return on your Money! Our Report tells you how! FFP, 277 E. Carmel Drive B-16, Carmel, IN 46032

**"HUNDRED\$ WEEKLY"!** GUARANTEED PROCESSING STAMPED ENVELOPES! **\$START IMMEDIATELY! FREE DETAILS! WRITE: MJG-DPG, AMBLER, PA 19002.**

**GOOD MONEY!** Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! No Selling! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

**EASY** Business, earn \$1,000's Weekly! Free details! Send Stamped Addressed Envelope: Todco, Dept. 3, 4219 W. Olive Ave., Burbank, CA 91505.

**EARN** Money, Recognition with Magic Routines. Proven method \$5. DKC Publications, P.O. 183, Burnet, Texas 78611.

## MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

**FREE** Info about 7 Home Based Businesses. Send SASE to Lucky 7 Mailorder Products, P.O. Box 10845, Lynchburg, VA 24506.

\$500 MONTHLY, work at home, receive money daily. For complete set-up send \$1.00: **SUPPLIES UNLIMITED, INC.,** BOX 2265, NORTHBROOK, IL 60065.

**GET RICH!** Zero Investment. No Borrowing. Free Details. Money, 6520 Selma, (#32HA6), Los Angeles, CA 90028.

**THOUSANDS** Weekly Possible. Fantastic Home Mailing Program. Free Details. MMI-J, Box 339, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055.

**HOMEWORKERS NEEDED!** Must own sewing machine. Instructions \$3.00. Sewmasters, Box 283A, Osseo, Minnesota 55369.

**EASY MONEY** at home. \$1000's To Be Made. Send SASE. CCEA, INC., Box 16844, Atlanta, GA 30321.

**THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THE ZIP CODE:** please se it when ordering merchandise from classified advertisements. You'll receive faster delivery.

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**CHRISTIAN SINGLES OUTREACH.** Local/Worldwide—Phone Mail Introductions. Free Information/Fast Service. Write: Box 9020-TM, Van Nuys, CA 91409.

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MONEY**

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BY READING and ANSWERING  
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# Classified Continued

AH-DECEMBER/86

## PERSONAL—Cont'd

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth \$2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send \$2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

SINGLE disabled white man, 24, wishes correspondence with marriage interested women. Include photo. Richard Markowski, 8000 West Brentwood Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53223.

SHY? LONELY? \$5 and one paragraph about you guarantees you 50 introductions. AFI, 1765 N. Highland, Suite 766, Los Angeles, CA 90028.

SINGLES, US/WORLDWIDE, seek enlightened correspondence, sincere friendships. SCANNA INTERNATIONAL-CO3 Box 4, Pittsford, NY 14534.

UNIVERSITY DEGREES! Economical home study for Bachelor's, Masters, Doctorate. Prestigious faculty counsels for independent study and life experience credits. Free information—Richard Crews, M.D. (Harvard), President, Columbia Pacific University, 1415 Third St., Dept. 2M10, San Rafael, CA 94901; Toll Free: 800/227-1617, Ext. 480; California: 800/772-3545, Ext. 480.

## RECORDS, TAPES & SOUND EQUIPMENT

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